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Special thanks this issue to: Brian Cooney, Sean at the Claudia Christian Fan Club, Karen Levell, Nick Setchfield, the bloke in the Wolf 359 audience who shouted out, "he wants a kiss," Terrance Dicks, Gareth Thomas, Sheelagh Wells

Subscriptions
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900 Somerton, Somerset TA11 7BR

Customer Services (01225) 822510
Customer Order Line: (01225) 822511; Fax (01458) 274378

The basic annual subs rate is £24. For details of special subs offers, turn to page 105, or call (01225) 442244.

For international licensing enquiries, please contact **Kate Cunningham** +44 (0)171 331 3920 +44 (0)171 447 3499

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SFX recommends: *The Frighteners, DS9*'s season five cliffhanger, *B5* (again, but it's worth it), *Men In Black*, Ostrich Burgers...

The Spoiler Zone

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Special, vacuum-packed reviews of the latest *Babylon 5* and *Deep Space Nine* episodes to air in the States, plus a look at what's happening US TV SF-wise in the Fall schedules.

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Jason Carter is back as Marcus Cole with his Swiss Army Fighting Stick-thing in the new season of *Babylon 5* – see page 70.

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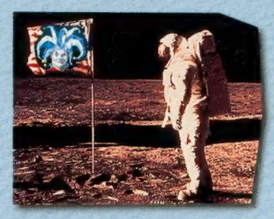

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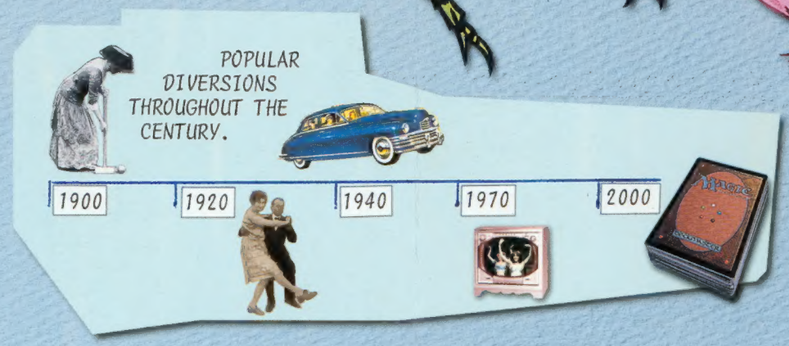

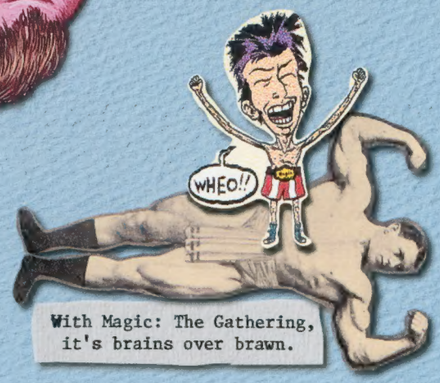

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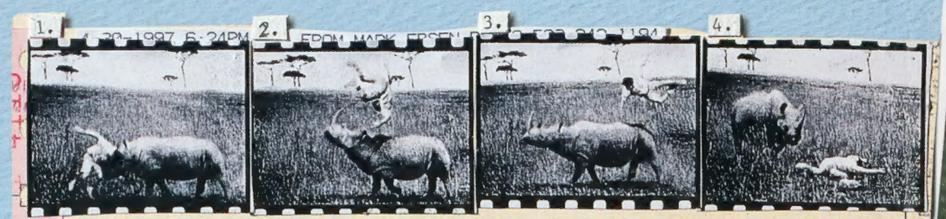

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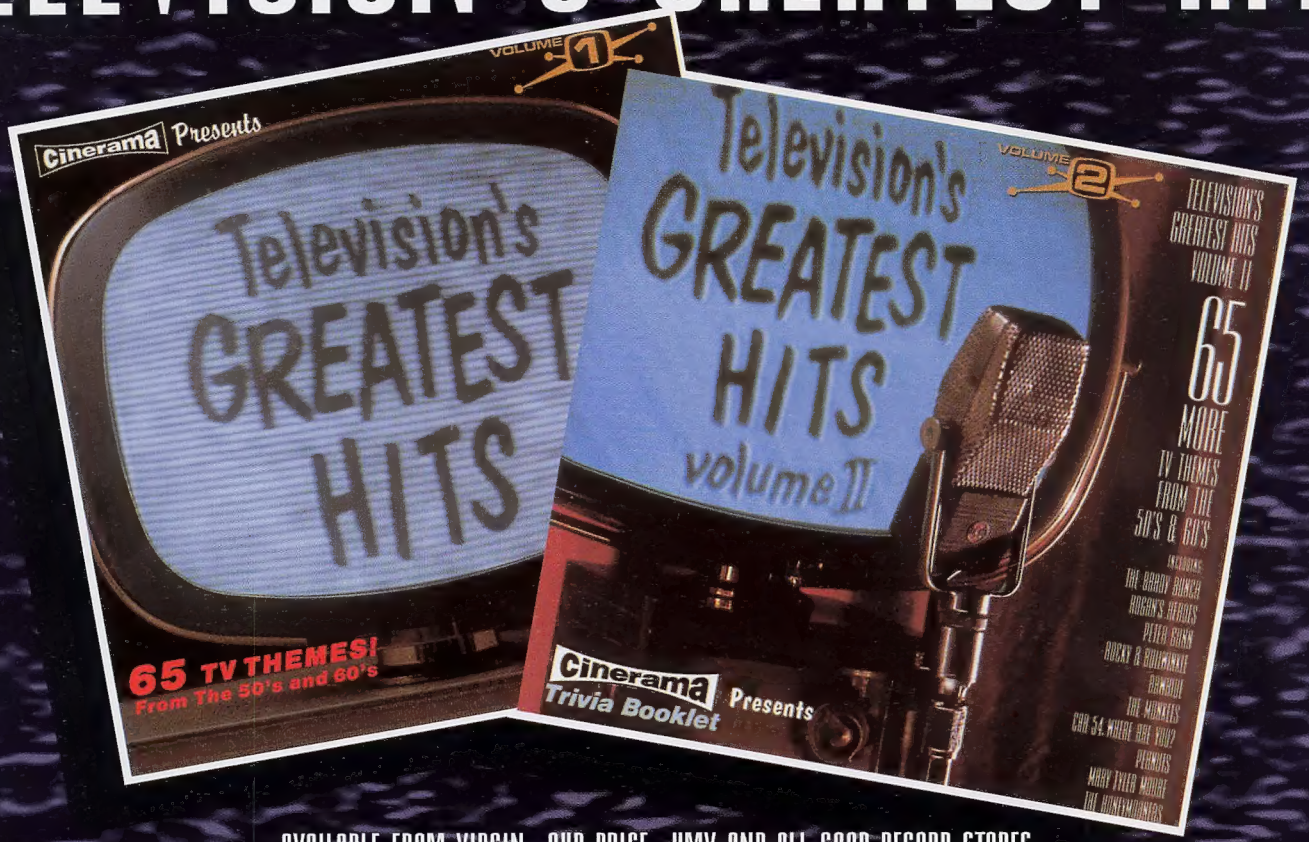
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ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME YOU GAVE VOYAGER ANOTHER CHANCE?

EVERYBODY KNOWS STAR TREK: VOYAGER IS A PILE OF CACKY OLD UNDERPANTS, RIGHT? WRONG, AS DAVE GOLDER ARGUES IN THE FIRST OF A NEW REGULAR SERIES IN WHICH SFX DEFENDS THE UNDERDOG...

THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION: Well, it's pants, isn't it? The most boring addition to a franchise running rapidly out of steam, *Voyager* is the same dull, talky, technobabble-laden plot week after week after week. Either the ship comes across a blue fuzz in space which causes something weird to happen (usually solved by a barium sweep) or the crew go down to a planet where one of the team undergoes some emotional watershed. And that captain! Her expression is more fixed than her '50s schoolteacher's hairdo. And that irritating Katherine-Hepburn-on-helium voice just makes you want to phaser her larynx.

As for the crew, what a bunch of no-hopers. Paris is straight out of *Flash Gordon,* Chakotay is a plank of wood, Tuvok is a poor Xerox of Spock, Kim is a wimp and Neelix... Well, Neelix should be entered in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as a definition for a useless, irritating token alien comedy character (shortly before being entered into the waste disposal unit). The series does nothing that hasn't been done better in countless original *Trek* or *TNG* episodes, and even the set-up, with the ship trying to return home from the Delta Quadrant, has been totally short-circuited, since they seem to go round in circles all the time. If they really want to get home, how come they spent so long in Kazon space? And talking of the Kazon – Klingons having a bad hair day, basically.

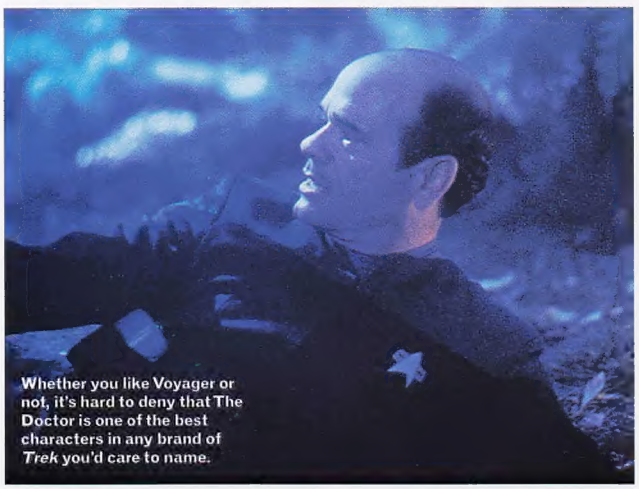
"Heroes And Demons" proves that while The Doctor is a great character, stories based around him have been generally poor.

THE CASE FOR THE DEFENCE: *Voyager* has its faults, but let's look at it another way. If the show had been on in the mid-'80s, up against tat like *Buck Rogers* or *War Of The Worlds,* it'd be hailed as a masterpiece.

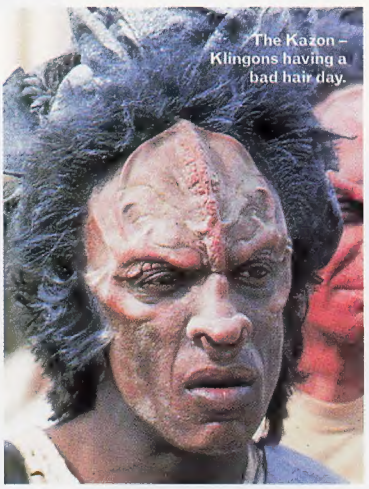
PROSECUTION: Surely the defence isn't resting on the notion that there have been worse series? Of course there have, but that doesn't make it good.

DEFENCE: No, the point is that *Voyager* has suffered from a disproportionate amount of criticism, purely because we have so many good SF series around these days – and *Voyager,* being one of the less successful, gets unfairly slammed because of it. If you're being completely honest, some of *Voyager's* best episodes – "Projections," "Warlord" and "The Chute" – are truly great slices of TV SF.

PROSECUTION: But that's three out of over 60 episodes! I bet you could even find episodes of *seaQuest* that are defensible. It still doesn't mean the show is any good. No matter how brilliant the concepts are in any one story, you've still got to put up with that wooden cast and loads of other derivative, slow-moving episodes.



Whether you like Voyager or not, it's hard to deny that The Doctor is one of the best characters in any brand of *Trek* you'd care to name.



The Kazon – Klingons having a bad hair day.

DEFENCE: Admittedly, *Voyager* was slow off the mark, and season one was packed with stories lifted from previous *Trek* series. And, yes, having them encounter a temporal anomaly every other episode did make you feel like you were trapped in a Brannon Braga script yourself, but that's improving now. Things picked up in season two, and really got going in season three. "Basics Part II" was a pretty much an all-action Western in space, while "Macrocosm" was an attempt at doing a warped version of *Aliens* and the excellent time-travel two parter "Future's End," while an obvious attempt to recreate the buzz of *Star Trek: The Voyage Home,* showed that *Voyager* could do time-travel stories with wit and ingenuity (not to mention a couple of great effects). The action quota has picked up a fair bit too, and the actual stories are getting more original and adventurous.

(Left) "Hang on – you've got even worse hair than me."

(Top) Tuvok is a better vehicle for exploring Vulcan culture than Spock ever was.

(Above) Kes gets good – then leaves.

PROSECUTION: But there's still an over-reliance on old *Trek* standbys.

DEFENCE: But even here, *Voyager* is starting to do something interesting, even Brechtian...

PROSECUTION: Oh come on, we're not going to argue that *Voyager's* post-modern, are we?

DEFENCE: Nah, but it is playing with the audience's expectations. Take "Warlord," for example. Kes gets taken over by an alien. A *Trek* standby. Audience expects 40 minutes of the rest of crew wondering why Kes is acting so strange, while she surreptitiously reprograms the replicators to produce sentient man-eating catfood or whatever. But instead, the crew works out what's happened

within a few minutes and the story takes a refreshing – action-packed – twist.

Something similar happened in "Coda," the one where Janeway dies loads of times. It starts off with the same scene happening, and the audience is already thinking, "Hello, temporal anomaly. Yawn," mere seconds before Janeway goes, "We must be in a temporal anomaly." There's even a big blue fuzz in space. But it turns out not to be a temporal anomaly at all...

Prosecution: All very funny, I'm sure. But in-jokes do not a good programme make.

Defence: No, but it does show the writers are aware of the problem and willing to do something about it. Besides, both episodes were pretty good in their own right. The stories are getting pacier; the ideas are getting stronger; the characters are getting more interesting.

Prosecution: Interesting characters? This must be this thing you Earthlings call humour...

Defence: No, really. Janeway gets a bad press and it's totally undeserved. Most people can't look further than the voice (we concede; it can be irritating), but Kate Mulgrew actually puts in a very subtle performance. Look at the contrast between her acting when she on the bridge and when she's relaxing. You often get the feeling during those ready room scenes that, as a captain, she has to put up this front all the time, even going as far as "mucking in" with the crew on the holodeck – something Picard was always loathe to do. Her "woodenness" is an act, the act of a captain being forced into a situation where she cannot afford to unwind at any time in public.

Admittedly, this doesn't make her such a dramatically interesting character as the emotionally-retarded Picard (watching him being uncomfortable sorting out his crew's personal problems was always fun) but as a captain, Janeway actually fulfils her role better. Besides, the situation is improving... Janeway in season three has been much more dynamic (see "Macrocosms") and confrontational (see "Fair Trade"). They've even started taking the piss out of her hands-on-hips stance, although a couple of jokes about the immaculately *coiffured* hair wouldn't go amiss...

And one last thing. Watch her episodes with Q. The captain shows a nice line in humour which makes her a much more interesting sparring partner for the omnipotent one than Sisko.

Prosecution: But Janeway isn't the only problem.

Defence: Hmm, Neelix is a bit of a dead loss, sure – and Kim must rate as one of the most underdeveloped regular characters in *Trek* history – but the rest of the crew members have a lot to offer, especially the Doctor.

Prosecution: There I concede a point...

Defence: Indeed. It's almost a *cliché* now... Even people who hate *Voyager* with a vehemence admit the Doctor is good. It's easy to see that in the hands of a lesser actor he could have become little more than a bland re-run of Data. But with the superb Robert Picardo, the Doctor has turned out to be the show's star character – brusque, rude, witty, sardonic, arrogant, enquiring and *naïve* – and he gets all the best lines. Strangely, episodes which centre on him, with the exception of the excellent "Projections," have been a bit dull (check out the treacly "Heroes And Demons"), but when he's a supporting character in a story, he always livens things up. No wonder he turned up in *First Contact* (sort of) and *Deep Space Nine* (even more sort of).

Prosecution: But a black Vulcan? Surely, some kind of audience-boosting gimmick?

Defence: Perhaps, but one that works. Tim Russ plays Tuvok superlatively, and the fact he's all

(Above) Season three sees Captain Janeway taking the mick out of her quirks, like her solid hair and hands-on-hips stance.

(Right) After apparently travelling around in circles in Kazon space for two seasons, Voyager is finally flying away to explore new parts of the Delta Quadrant.

Vulcan, unlike Spock, means that, at last, Vulcan culture can be explored properly. Even better, the fact Vulcans suppress their emotions – they're not naturally emotionless – comes across a lot more clearly and intriguingly. Okay, so sometimes Tuvok is so stuffy he comes across like Rimmer from *Red Dwarf*, but that adds to the fun – a deflation of pretensions. It's just a shame the Pon-Farr episode, "Blood Fever" concentrated on another Vulcan character; it would have been fun to see him coming on to Janeway.

Prosecution: Ugh! What a horrible thought.

Defence: As for the rest, well, it took a while for Kes to be something more than a reject from *The Brady Bunch*, and her fling with Neelix was crippling, but she eventually matured into a very strong-willed character by season three. It's a shame she's leaving.

Prosecution: Especially if she was going to wear more of those leather outfits, hmm?

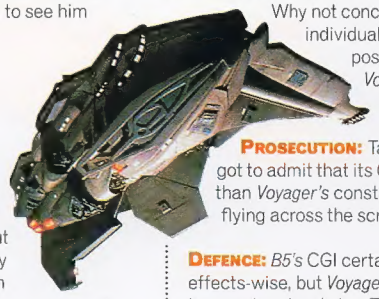
Defence: But now she's being replaced by a more interesting character, a female Borg. Admittedly, the make-up job looks a bit disappointing (there's hardly any, in fact – obviously they want to make it easy to do week-in, week-out), but the potential of the character is enormous. Especially when it comes to future meetings with the Borg.

Prosecution: But surely introducing the Borg is yet another ratings-grabbing device?

Defence: Er, yes. What's wrong with that? I'm sure audiences aren't going to object to a bit of Borg action. And at least *Voyager* has finally left Kazon space. That lot, I admit, were dull, so good riddance. Now the future looks a lot brighter, with Voyager striking up an uneasy alliance with the Borg to fight an even greater foe. Don't get me wrong. I don't want to see the show ending up like *Buck Rogers* – a video game with continuous space battles – but there's still room for thought-provoking character pieces like "The Chute" and intriguing SF conundrum episodes like "Alter Ego."

Prosecution: But aren't arc plots all the rage?

Defence: Arc plots are best left to SF series with a central setting and a stock set of cultures and worlds, like *Babylon 5* and *Deep Space Nine*. *Voyager* is about a, um, a voyage, so it needs to be as varied as possible. A few running subplots would work, but if they're anything like the half-hearted attempt *Voyager* made in season two – with Paris becoming a "traitor" – I'd rather have the self-contained stuff. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with episodic drama without a running plot, and *Voyager's* been running too long now to suddenly introduce an arc. Why not concentrate on making each individual episode as good as possible? Which is what *Voyager* is attempting to do, albeit with a few hiccups.



Prosecution: Talking of *Babylon 5*, you've got to admit that its CGI effects look a lot better than *Voyager's* constant stock shots of the ship flying across the screen.

Defence: *B5's* CGI certainly offers more scope effects-wise, but *Voyager* has boasted some pretty impressive visuals too. The season three cliffhanger was a stunner as the Voyager and the Borg prepare to go into battle with the new alien threat, while "Future's End" is full of great effects moments, like the eponymous ship flying across LA. And what about the enjoyably slimey CGI cave monster in "Basics"? *Voyager* may not be as awash with effects as *Babylon 5*, but at least they always scream quality, often up to movie standard. If there's one thing you can't criticise about *Voyager*, it's the production values.

Prosecution: Well, they spend enough on it.

Defence: Well, if you've got it flaunt it.

THE EVIDENCE

SFX-SELECTED EPISODES TO BUY OR WATCH IF YOU'RE WILLING TO BE CONVERTED...

"Eye Of The Needle"
First season episode which brilliantly deals with the concept of the crew being stranded thousands of light years across the galaxy, with a genuinely unexpected twist.

"Initiations"
A rarity – a good Chakotay episode. Loads of action and low on technobabble.

"Projections"
One of early *Voyager's* finest, as the holographic Doctor is activated only to find the ship empty. Intriguing, often witty and only let down by a technobabble ending.

"Resistance"
Taut, intelligent SF, with Janeway, Tuvok and Torres imprisoned on a hostile alien planet.

"Meld"
Tuvok is at his best when he takes on the personality of a killer (Brad Dourif in excellent form) after he mindmelds with him. Seriously chilling.

"Deadlock"
Temporal anomaly episodes can be good! Two *Voyagers* exist in the same space, and all hell breaks loose. Great ending!

"Basics – Part I and II"
Action-adventure in space with dogfights, slimey monsters, heroic rescues, the lot!

"The Chute"
Slow and talky can be good! Kim and Paris are trapped in an alien prison in this surprisingly literate and intense drama.

"Future's End – Parts I and II"
A pretty successful attempt at recapturing the flavour of *Star Trek: The Voyage Home*. Even Neelix gets a good scene.

"Macrocosm"
Janeway does a passable Ripley impression as she fights to save the ship. Great CGI aliens too.

"The Warlord"
Kes in leather, and the weirdest sex threesome ever (is it a bloke and two women, or a woman and two blokes, or two blokes and two women?). Loads of action.

"Scorpion"
A new enemy even more powerful than the Borg? You'd better believe it.

THE TRUTH...

IS YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE

CONQUEST EARTH

"FIRST ENCOUNTER"

OUT SOON ON PLAYSTATION

ALSO AVAILABLE ON PC CD-ROM

PlayStation

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HERE COME THE MEN IN BLACK, PLUS GODZILLA, INTERGALACTIC SURF-PUNKS MAN OR ASTROMAN, DISNEY'S LATEST TOON, HERCULES, AND THE PLANET MIRTH TEAM. PLUS WACKINESS AND WEARINESS AT WOLF 359!

IVANOVA 'N' OUT

CONTRACTUAL COMPLICATIONS LEAVE CLAUDIA IN THE COLD

Claudia Christian will *not* be returning to *Babylon 5* for the fifth season. The news broke during the Wolf 359 convention on Saturday 12 July, when *Variety* reported that Christian would be leaving the show and was seeking other work.

Both Christian and J Michael Straczynski insist that they spent the convention attempting to find a way she could stay with the show, but disagree over what went wrong.

According to Straczynksi, "Warner Brothers received one-month extensions on their contract options from all cast members except Claudia in early June... Claudia said she was on board for the season, but didn't want to give the extension for business reasons. We took her at her word.

"While we were in Blackpool, word reached us of the articles in *Variety*. This was the first indication we had that she would not be in season five. Claudia was still saying that she was going to be in season five... but did nothing to address the situation. All she had to do was pick up the phone. This did not happen. It was clear that she had no intention of staying. On Monday, she left the convention early, and never called.

"Bottom line is... she passed on season five. All the other actors signed on, and urged her to do the same. She chose not to. It was never a matter of anyone not wanting her."

However, Christian disputes this, insisting she was sacked after requesting time off to make a movie. "On 20 June, I was told the fate of the fifth season. We were asked to give up the residuals for that season, which was okay. However, I wanted to get their assurance that I could get four episodes off to do a film. That was the only thing I was asking for. No raise, (actually, a pay-cut), just fewer episodes.

Craig Stennett

Claudia: wanted to be fewer episodes and ended up in none.

"I did not 'leave' the show or ask for more money. I did not create this mess. I would never abandon you."

Claudia Christian

"While I was in Europe, I heard about the gossip column in *Variety*. I have no idea who planted the gossip and, frankly, I didn't think much of it. I assumed negotiations for the fifth season would continue when we all returned home, but was told quite curtly that my request had been denied.

"In Blackpool, JMS said he would give me the episodes off. I trust him, but as he was not writing all the episodes I felt that I had to have something in writing.

"At this point, I was told I had until Monday to call Warner Bros... I called my agent and left word. On Monday I found out that my agent had received a fax stating that the offer was withdrawn. In essence, I was fired.

"I would do season five if I had fewer episodes. I've given my heart to the show and I love Ivanova as much as any of you. I did not 'leave' the show. I did not ask for more money. I did not create this mess. Perhaps this is a great lack of communication. I would like to think that. Thank you all for your support. I'd never abandon you."

Whatever the reasons for the change, Ivanova will now not appear in season five. This may force Straczynski to make slight changes to the already filmed episode 421. "While I will not recast the role, we will be bringing in a new character. Fortunately, 421 is structured to allow us to adjust for this, and the story will continue as planned with only a minor variation in the first two episodes."

In the meantime, Claudia Christian's next project will be a photo-shoot for *FHM* magazine...

THIS JUST IN...

DARIO ABSENTO
Italian *frightmeister* Dario Argento has unfortunately had to cancel his appearance at this year's Festival of Fantastic Films, as he will be in Romania shooting his new version of *Phantom Of The Opera*. However, Jimmy Sangster and the other guests will still be there, along with a selection of top films (including some of Argento's). For details, send an SAE to the address in Fantastic Days (see page 108).

BIG GREEN BOOK
No author name has been announced yet, but the rights to novelise *Godzilla* have been bought by HarperPrism for "an eye-popping six-figure sum," making it the most expensive movie tie-in ever.

LEGIONS OF FANS
Legionnaires, a spaceship-filled tale of Earth attacked by mysterious forces from beyond, is due to start filming early next year. Creative Independent have booked three sound stages at Elstree and signed up several big-name SF stars including Walter Koenig (Chekhov, Besten) and Robin Curtis (Saavik).

SLIDERS SAVED
The Sci Fi Channel in the US has rescued *Sliders* from the vortex by financing a fourth season of 22 episodes. Rod Perth, president of the Sci-Fi Channel, "We're delighted to welcome this extraordinary series to the network." Downside? The budget will be cut to $1 million per episode.

STAR WARS EXTRAS
Fox are searching for extras to appear in the new *Star Wars* trilogy, specifically 5' 10" to 6' men with their own transport (!). For more details, send a photo and a covering letter (detailing your height, chest and weight measurements) to Laura, Unit 45, Buspace Studios, Conlan Street, London W10 5AP. Meanwhile, locations for the film are being scouted in Italy and Tunisia.

ROBOTS OF DOOM
Judgement Day is coming! Three billion of us are due to die at the hands of SkyNet on Friday 29 August, which is, ironically, the same day that PolyGram Video are releasing the "T1000" edition of *Terminator II*. This is the version shown a while back on BBC 2: digitally remastered and with an extra 15 minutes of footage. Yours for £12.99. Full review next ish.

HIGHLAND LASS
It looks almost certain now that as well as spinning off into a movie, *Highlander: The Series* will also spawn a sequel show concentrating on a female Immortal.

PINN MONEY
Indie publisher Tanjen have some great titles lined up, including *Scattered Remains*, the first short story collection from rising horror star Paul Pinn, and *Scaremongers*, a charity anthology with stories from (among others) Mike Marshall Smith, Freda Warrington, Ramsey Campbell and Ray Bradbury.

Straight-to-TV

The latest SF movie franchise to transform into a TV series is *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*, which follows hot on the heels of the first straight-to-vid *Honey, I...* movie (see page 93).

John Landis, currently shooting *Blues Brothers 2000*, recently told **SFX** "St. Clare – my TV company in partnership with Leslie Belzberg – is now shooting *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids – The Series*, with a terrific cast headed by Peter Scolari. It's an extremely ambitious hour show for Buena Vista/Walt Disney TV. We are attempting to make a family, fantasy, action-adventure, sci-fi, comedy show every week!"

New Trek series!

There are strong mutterings in the *Trek* camp about "a new series" – and it seems likely that a Next *Next Generation* set 30 years on from the current *Trek* time-line, with a new starship crew, is likely. But what about some of the other rumours doing the rounds? Here's a guide to what, as far as we can tell, is definitely *not* happening...

"It is a good day to get a ratings-topping series!"

1. The Next Generation Animated Series: *Picard and co. continue their mission in only two dimensions.* No change for Data then! Allegedly a VP from Nickelodeon pitched this to Rick Berman, having met with *Trek* licensees who were worried about poor *Voyager* merchandise sales. Berman's supposed response was that such a series would "cheapen the franchise."

Cheapen the franchise? Has he seen those Borg Toby jugs?

2. The Klingon series: *A shipful of Klingons boldly going where no Klingon has gone before.* Not sure where this came from; some "Wouldn't this be good?" speculation on a newsgroup probably. We remember the days when you had to publish this sort of stuff in fanzines, and it could take years for rumours to spread. This would need a make-up budget the size of *Alien Nation's!*

3. The Star Fleet Academy Series: *Bright college days for Kirk and Spock as youngsters.* This can be traced back to the rumours that were rampant after *Star Trek V;* George Takei claims that he was instrumental in knocking it on the head! The rumours resurfaced recently during production of the CD-ROM. The *Star Fleet Academy* comics and novels only add fuel to the rumours.

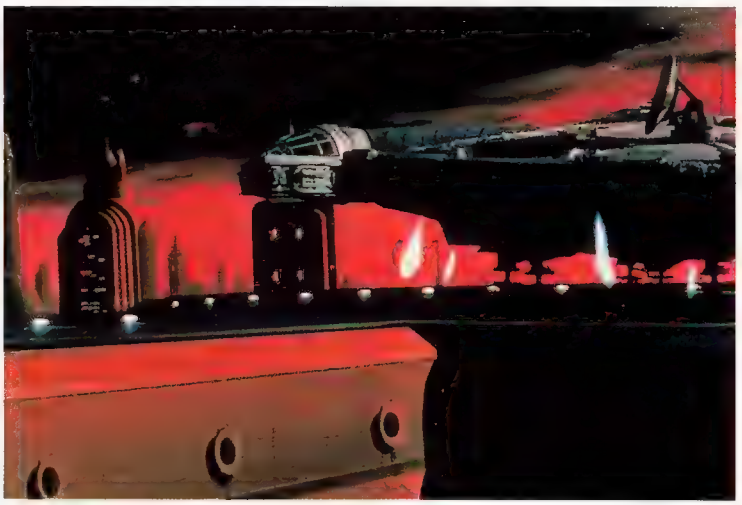
4. The Captain Wesley Crusher Series: *A Federation starship commanded by Beverly's boy, who is now all grown up.* This started on one of those (0891) telephone info-lines (no, not the "Hear me giggle as I'm spanked" ones) and we can assure you that it's complete rubbish.

5. The New Frontier Series: *Captain Mackenzie Calhoun pilots a refitted USS Excalibur.* No. These are books. There was one free on the front of last month's **SFX**, remember?

SFX Video News

VHS WARS

SPECIAL EDITIONS COMING TO TAPE



"You know Han, I'm sure Cloud City didn't look like this last time we were here!" Spot the differences on video this Autumn.

Despite previously saying that the Special Editions of the *Star Wars* Trilogy would not be released on video, Fox have announced that all three films will hit the shelves in VHS tape form on Monday 6 October, ready for big-time Christmas sales. Punters will have a choice of pan-and-scan or Widescreen editions, and there will also be a pair of boxed sets available. Start saving now.

Meanwhile, actor Warwick Davis (Wicket) has been cast in the new trilogy. "I can't tell you who or what my character is," he told **SFX** when we bumped into him at Wolf 359, "but he's 3' 6" tall!"

Given George Lucas' penchant for short characters (Jawas, Ugnauts, Ewoks, Luke Skywalker...), the new trilogy offers an unrivalled opportunity for short actors. Davis runs an agency for diminutive thespians and confirms that at least four have been cast in various roles.

Meanwhile, shooting continues on the *Star Wars* prequels (mainly second unit stuff, we believe) and a formal announcement is expected soon.

I'd like to thank...

The 1996 Bram Stoker Awards, presented annually by the Horror Writers Association, were handed out in New York on Saturday 21 June.

Stephen King's *The Green Mile*, published in six parts, won Best Novel, while PD Cacek won Best Short Story with "Metalica" in the anthology *Hot Blood: Fear The Fever*. Thomas Ligotti celebrated a double-whammy with two awards for "The Red Tower" (Best Long Fiction, Novelette) and *The Nightmare Factory* (Best Collection).

Owl Going Back, possibly the only Native American writing in the genre, won Best First Novel for *Crota*, while ST Joshi won the Best Non-Fiction Award for his biography of Chthulu creator HP Lovecraft in *HP Lovecraft: A Life*. Two Life Achievement Awards were presented to *Rosemary's Baby/Boys From Brazil/Stepford Wives* author Ira Levin and octogenarian mega-fan Forrest J Ackerman.

Speaking of Uncle Forry, **SFX** is pleased to announce that from next issue Ackerman will be writing a regular **SFX** column based on his unique (and famously huge) collection of science fiction material.

New season line-up for 2000AD

Classic comic *2000AD* is preparing an adaptation of *A Life Less Ordinary*, the upcoming angelic fantasy film from cinematic *wunderkind* Danny *(Shallow Grave, Trainspotting)* Boyle. The adaptation *(2000AD's* first film tie-in) is by Steve Yeovil and is part of the comic's stonking Autumn line-up, which includes an all-sex issue in prog 1066. Oo-er.

In a few weeks' time you'll be able to follow several all-new "thrills," including *The Space Girls*, a group of genetically engineered clones sporting names like Deep Space, Wide Open Space and Inner Space – and personalities to match. BLAIR 1, a satirical tale penned by Alan Grant, is also heading our way. This started life as a one-shot spoof (of early *2000AD* story MACH1) in the *3000AD* supplement given away with the comic's anniversary issue earlier this year. Coupled with the return of the fatties in *Judge Dredd* and the lovable Russian rogue Nikolai Dante, this fresh influx should mark a strong season for the galaxy's greatest comic.

X-WRITERS BACK TO CARTER'S FOLD

Last issue, SFX broke the exclusive news that former *X-Files* and *Space: Above And Beyond* writers Glen Morgan and James Wong were to join *Millennium* as executive producers. Now it appears that among Morgan and Wong's appointed writers for the show's second series is Glen's brother, award-winning former *X-Files* writer Darin. He has written a forthcoming *Millennium* script in which Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) is hailed as the Antichrist by devil-worshippers.

In the interim, Morgan and Wong are said to have had some revolutionary ideas about the second series, including separating Black from his family as he pursues a multiple murderer across the US, adding a more overtly supernatural element to the character's premonitions – as well as gearing up for a stonking Hallowe'en episode. "They're going to do for *Millennium* with the second series what they did for *The X-Files* in the first," says a source close to the writer/producer team.

Diagonal-walking horror for agents M&S.

Nevertheless, Morgan and Wong are still said to be seething after their treatment at the hands of Chris Carter and Fox TV, who cancelled their pilot *The Notorious Seven*. "It was total blackmail," a source close to the team suggests. "Chris wanted them to take over *Millennium*, and [he knew] there was no way they could do that with their own series running." However, a Fox spokeswoman insists that there was no sinister conspiracy behind the decision. "Some pilots get picked up; others don't. When their new show wasn't [picked up], Fox offered Morgan and Wong *Millennium* as a favour to them and to Chris."

Whatever the truth behind Morgan and Wong's relocation to *Millennium*, both Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz have left the show to concentrate on the *X-Files* feature film and fifth series. While plot details are more closely guarded than anything at Area 51 (or see this issue's Spoiler Zone, starting on page 35), Fox has confirmed that *X-Files* regulars Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) and the Lone Gunmen (Bruce Harwood, Dean Haglund and Tom Braidwood) appear in the film, for which principal photography has now been completed, with a release currently scheduled for May 1998.

"My thought was that we wouldn't be in the movie simply because a motion picture of *The X-Files* is basically two episodes of the TV show," says Bruce Harwood, who plays the smart-dressed Lone Gunman Byers. "In a movie you have to make a different kind of impact on the audience, [so] I thought initially that a two-hour movie would want to go straight for the guts of the thing, [with] the two stars out there dealing with some kind of mystery, and that our characters wouldn't be required [because] they would just get in the way of people who don't watch the show regularly but just decided to see the movie."

Stars in their eyes

Although the musical tastes of the SFX team may vary wildly, we have no hesitation in giving the SFX seal of approval to top US sci-fi loonies Man... Or Astroman?

Taking their name from the poster copy for a dodgy '60s Japanese SF movie, the Alabama foursome churn out a mixture of loud guitars and SF samples which is best summed up as a sort of sci-fi cyber-surf punkabilly. Or something. The band members are Star Crunch, Birdstuff, Dr Deleto and CoCo The Electronic Monkey Wizard, although we suspect these aren't their real names.

The band's current album, *Your Weight On The Moon*, is out now under One Louder Records on both CD and luminous vinyl, and was allegedly recorded at the Cape Canaveral space centre. In September, they release their fourth album, *Made From Technetium*.

Man... Or Astroman? take time out from looking, er, strange, to go on tour...

You can catch Man... Or Astroman? doing their nationwide tour of old Blighty at the following venues: Manchester Roadhouse Club (30 August), Glasgow Nice'n'Sleazy (31 August), Dundee West Port Bar (1 September), Edinburgh Castle-Rock (2 September), Newcastle-upon-Tyne Cumberland Arms (3 September), Nottingham Narrow Boat (4 September), Newport TJ's (5 September), Portsmouth Doc's (6 September), Brighton Beach Comber (7 September), London St John's Tavern (8 September).

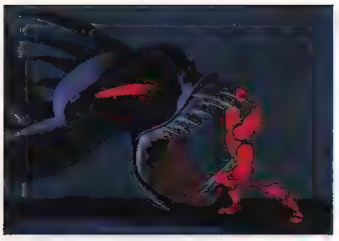
Just one of the new idents for Bravo.

Odd 'n' kooky idents for Bravo

Bravo! It's the home of dodgy Japanese animation, dodgy Redemption pervo-vampire films and, um, well, Troma. And we love 'em!

Now the channel has a new catchphrase – "Are you weird enough to watch?" – and a string of new idents to go with it. Take your pick from Mistress Charlotte the dominatrix; John the bondage bloke (and his charming assistant); Joe and Yella, two people who think they're anime characters; Mona, a Gothic chick who is convinced she's a vampire; and a truckload of other kooks.

Anybody tuning in to see repeats of *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* is in for a bit of a shock and no mistake.



Pop on down to MOMI and see Scarfe's original designs (plus faxes and film rushes) for Disney's upcoming *Hercules*.

Pleased Scarfe

Early reports on this year's Disney feature-length cartoon, *Hercules* – written and directed by John Musker and Ron Clements *(Aladdin, The Little Mermaid)*, with songs by Alan *(Little Shop Of Horrors)* Menken and David Zippel – are that it's dead good. Best of all, though, is that political cartoonist Gerald Scarfe has put his stamp firmly on the movie with his brilliantly idiosyncratic character designs.

An exhibition of his contributions is currently on at the Museum Of The Moving Image (until 11 November), and features original paintings and even unfinished film rushes.

"I'm really happy with the film," Scarfe told **SFX**. "It's unprecedented for somebody outside of Disney to work on a film like this, but they were completely receptive to my ideas."

Hercules opens here in the UK on Friday 10 October.

New Oktober show

Our mate TV writer/novelist Stephen Gallagher writes with good news: "My *Oktober* mini-series adaptation has made it over the last hurdle with ITV."

Oktober, which was originally published in 1988, is the story of the complications which ensue when a drug is discovered which enables the user to enter other people's dreams. The mini-series will be produced by Carnival Films, for whom Gallagher wrote several episodes of *Bugs*.

"We start pre-production in August for an October shoot," says Steve. "It will be three hours long, with me directing and Stephen Tompkinson in the lead role. One major downer, though: I'll miss World Fantasy Con."

More news on this project in a future issue of **SFX**.

***Drop The Dead Donkey's* Stephen Tompkinson is taking the lead.**

And the SFX award for the worst piece of video marketing goes to...

Having persuaded X-philes to part with their cash for a flash of La Anderson in *The Turning*, Unique Films are now targeting Trekkies by releasing *Blind Date*, a 1984 film in which Marina Sirtis gets to play a hooker who, er gets her baps out...

Or as the *News Of The World* quote on the sleeve subtly puts it: "It's phwoarr factor ten... *Star Trek* beauty can't Klingon to her clothes."

Thankfully, *Blind Date* (aka *Deadly Seduction*), has nothing to do with that dodgy dating series on ITV.

SFX Film News

MIB IS A HIT!

BLACK BUSTS BOX OFFICE RECORDS

Prepare yourselves for a shock. An SF film with a plot, real characters and a certain amount of dry humour has broken previous box office records by grossing more than *ID4* in its first three days in America and making it past $100 million in just over a week. And that film is *Men In Black*.

Okay, there is nothing unusual in this *per se*. Sci-fi films constantly break new records – but then they're usually whip-me-whop-me-look-at-these-fantastic-effects-no-brainers about dinosaurs or bats. Let's hope some of those Hollywood fatcats sit up and take note...

Meanwhile, the *Men In Black* soundtrack album is currently available from Columbia Records, featuring tracks from 3T, De La Soul, and lots of modern beat combos that we've never heard of. The title track (by Will Smith, natch) is also out as a single. Not only is it a toe-tappingly pleasant little number, but it has a brilliant video, featuring Mikey the alien (who sings and dances) and a guest appearance by Tommy Lee Jones.

You've seen the film now watch the video – the music video, that is. Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones and Mikey the alien star!

Godzilla teaser

As if *Men In Black* wasn't a good enough reason to go to the movies, US audiences now have an extra incentive – a teaser trailer for *Godzilla* doing the rounds with *MIB* which has a dig at *The Lost World*.

In the trailer, a school party is being shown around a natural history museum. The guide shows them a T-Rex skeleton and explains that it was the largest, most fiercesome carnivore ever to walk the Earth. At this, the ground starts to shake, and a massive green foot comes smashing through the roof, grinding the dino to dust!

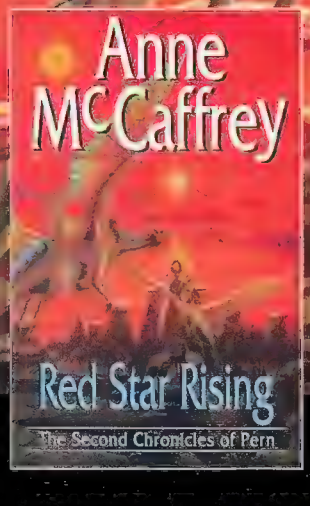
A spokesman for *Godzilla* fandom (well, okay, it was Mike), said: "It's dead cool."

The finger points
To an Eye blood-red.
Alert the Weyrs
To sear the Thread.

Anne McCaffrey

Red Star Rising

The Second Chronicles of Pern



A SPELLBINDING NEW NOVEL OF THE DRAGONS OF PERN.

'Anne McCaffrey, one of the queens of science fantasy, knows exactly how to give her public what it wants'
THE TIMES

OUT NOW IN CORGI PAPERBACK

CORGI

More spinning heads

The *Exorcist* franchise is set to return to the cinema screen in the form of a prequel written by William Wisher, co-author of *Terminator II*.

Wisher, no doubt prompted by some force from beyond, wishes to explore Father Merrin's first battle with the Devil. It was this, unseen, encounter that ultimately led to his death in the first film, so the story potential is good.

And with *The Exorcist* being the highest earning horror flick of all time, it's more than likely that the project will get underway in Africa sometime next year.

Could this engender a video release of the original film?

"Possessed by the demon Pazuzu, I took a ride on a merry-go-round," as *B5/Lost In Space* star Bill Mumy once sang...

Role on SFX

As you may be aware, our sister role-playing magazine *Arcane* recently passed on to the great pulping mill in the sky, but if you're now worrying where you'll get such great reviews of RPG/fantasy game merchandise, fear not! As of next month, SFX is shouldering that oiled rucksack and hefting its trusty broadsword (+d6 damage) then grasping a flaming brand (three copper pieces) and poking it into the darkest crannies of the dingiest dungeons around with a new two-page Month In Gaming Section. Coo! So if you've never tried RPG's, boardgaming or tabletop stuff, maybe it's time to try...

SF film poster art!

To coincide with the launch of their new Website and book, The Reel Poster Gallery are hosting a series of exhibitions of film poster art.

The first, starting on Tuesday 23 September, will cover the turbulent '60s, and feature plenty of SF material, including promotional material for *Doctor Who And The Daleks* and *Barbarella*. Other exhibitions will be on such topics as the poster art of Warhol and films from Italy.

If you fancy copping a look at what enticed young '60s folk into the cinema to see *Goldfinger*, or wish to indulge in a bit of pasted paper nostalgia, then visit: **First Floor, 22 Great Marlborough Street, London, W1V 1AF.** The gallery is open from 10.30am-6pm, Mon-Sat, and until 8pm Thurs-Fri.

The Reel Poster Gallery's Website, is at: **http//www.reelposter.com**

SFX Preview

DISC GOES PRO

TEL'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL PLAY...

The first ever professional stage adaptation of a Discworld novel is scheduled for a major national tour early next year.

Adapted by novelist-dramatist-journo Geoffrey Cush, the "new" version of *Guards! Guards!* is to be directed by Peter Benedict, who last year helmed *Macbeth* (with Mark McGann), *Mapp & Lucia – The Musical* (with Kate O'Mara and Fenella Fielding) and Cush's open-air version of *The Three Musketeers*.

"Mike Lias, the producer, came to me with the idea," explains Benedict. "We investigated the Stephen Briggs adaptation, but didn't feel it was suitable. We moved into a fringe venue to develop Geoffrey Cush's script, but people were beating the door down for tickets."

The play was honed and refined over four weeks at the Latchmere Theatre, London, but when the script was finally presented to Pratchett for approval, it had been refined slightly *too* much.

"We'd taken out Corporal Nobbs, but Terry was adamant that we had to put him back in, so we've had to develop the script still further to reincorporate Nobby!"

Casting is underway, although Benedict is aware that the word "Discworld" has more pulling power than most big name actors. The tour will start in February 1998 and take in about 15-20 venues before possibly transferring to the West End. Exact details will be announced in **SFX** as soon as they're finalised.

Scenes from the Disc: last year's London try-out of *Guards! Guards!*

Now everything in black & white makes sense

Voyager no limits

log on for more information about Voyager on: http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager

WOLF 359

IT WAS THE BIGGEST BABYLON 5 CON EVER, WITH JUST ABOUT EVERY REGULAR ACTOR FROM THE SERIES MAKING AN APPEARANCE OVER THE FOUR HOT JULY DAYS IN BLACKPOOL'S NORBRECK CASTLE HOTEL.

The name of the con might originate from a *Star Trek* episode, but Wolf 359: The Alliance was the world's biggest *B5* event ever, boasting a guest list which featured all the series' main stars. For four days, attendees queued, chatted with the stars and bore witness to some incredible moments on stage (most of which involved Andreas (G'Kar) Katsulas dancing, singing or kissing other guests).

Claudia (Ivanova) Christian appeared at a cocktail party for her fans, Jerry (Garibaldi) Doyle made a surprise appearance and producer-creator JMS even had a tear in his eye at the end of The **SFX** Awards Ceremony. Full report – plus behind-the-scenes gossip! – next issue.

Jerry Doyle was Monday's surprise guest.

Julie Caitlin (Na'Toth) Brown was often caught jamming with Bill (Lennier) Mumy.

(Above) Gareth "Blake" Thomas presented JMS with his SFX award, and brought tears to the producer's eyes. (Left) Ed "Morden" Wasser auditions for a Colgate ad.

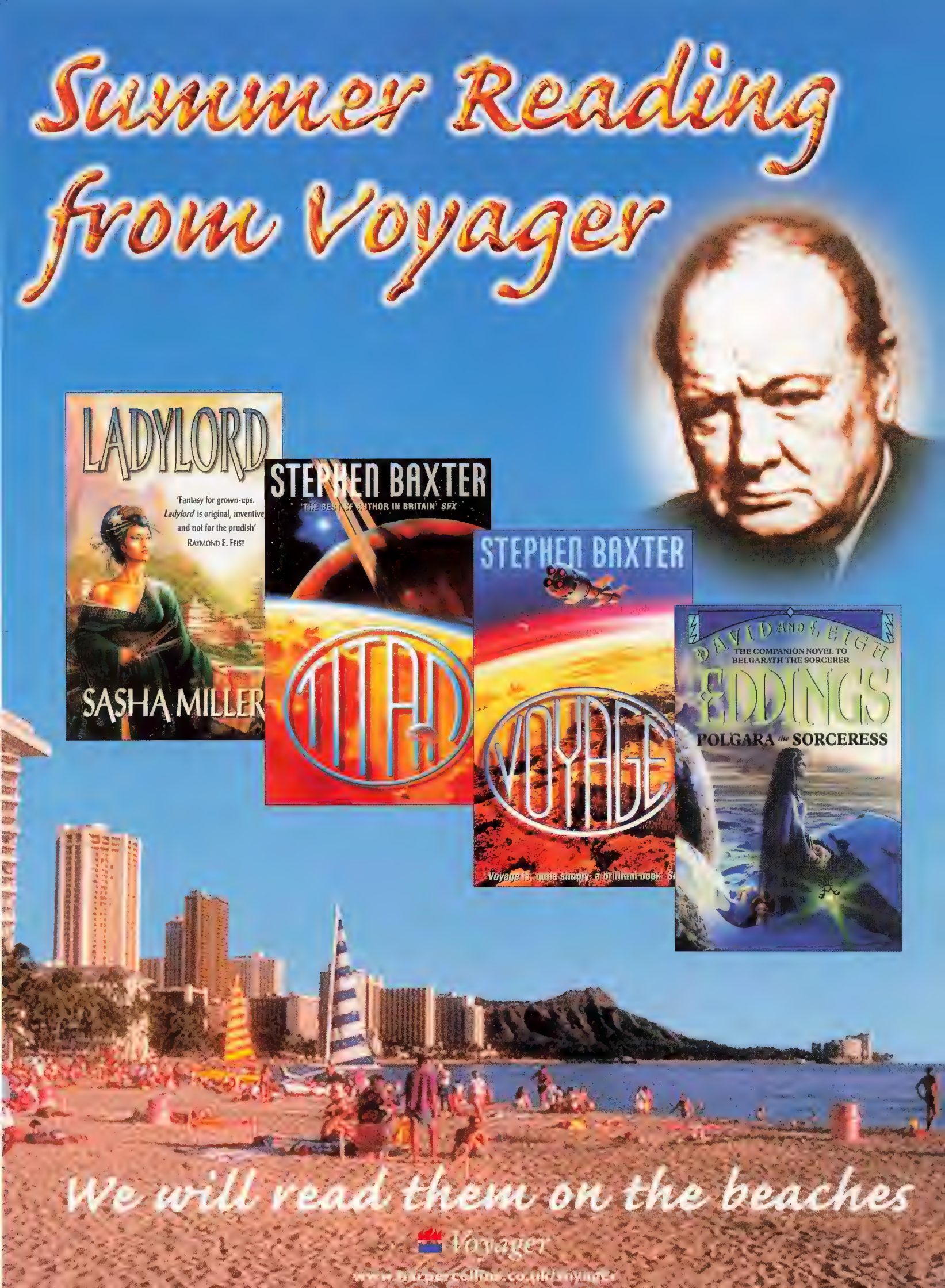
Julie Caitlin Brown gives Andreas Katsulas his SFX award for best actor.

Jerry Doyle with some very tired-looking Wolf stewards – it was a long weekend.

A guitar signed by the entire cast and crew of *B5* was auctioned for charity.

The winners of SFX's "meet Sheridan" compo (back, left) at the captain's table.

Summer Reading from Voyager



We will read them on the beaches

Voyager

www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager

FAHRENHEIT 451

Fanzines so hot they burn...

If you want your zine listed here, send a copy to SFX (Zines), Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. Note that each issue will be listed once. When ordering zines, make cheques/POs payable to the name in quotes unless otherwise indicated.

Bounty Hunter #8
Star Wars zine celebrates its fifth anniversary by looking at the *Star Wars* phenomenon. Plus news and fan fiction. 44pp, A4, £2.50. **"James Simmonds," 186 Station Rd, Burton Latimer, Nr Kettering, Northants NN15 5NU**

Claudia Christian Chronicle Vol.3 #1
B5 season four episode guide, Claudia in the press, plus news on her new movie ("Snide And Prejudice"). 20pp, A4, bi-monthly, £10 sub. **"S Harry," The Claudia Christian Appreciation Society, 148A Queensway, Bayswater, London W2 6LY**

Faze #9
Irreverent *Who* zine also looks at *Lois And Clark, Terminator II, The Next Generation,* etc. Traditional cut-and-paste layout techniques give this a proper fanzine "feel" - hooray! 48pp, A5, £1. **"John Connors," 8 Henley Rd, Liverpool L18 2DW**

The 5 Times #13
B5 fan club zine interviews Peter Jurasik, Jerry Doyle, Joshua Cox, Stephen Furst, Bill Mumy, John Freeman, plus all the *B5* news you could want. 28pp, A4, five times a year (hence the name!), £12.50 sub. **"Questing Beast Ltd," Babylon 5 UK Fan Club, PO Box 1, Blaenau Ffestiniog LL41 3ZB**

Kimota #6
Excellent SF/fantasy/horror fiction from Steve Gallagher, Peter Tennant, Paul Finch, Gary Couzens, Martin Owton, Dave O'Neill, Julie Travis, Kimberly Padgett-Clarke, David Longhorn and Caroline Dunford, plus Mike Marshall Smith interviewed. 84pp, A5, twice-yearly, £2.50 (four-issue sub £9). **52 Cadley Causeway, Fulwood, Preston, Lancs PR2 3RX**

Lower Decks #8
Nicely produced *TNG/DS9/Voyager* zine is up-to-date with news, reviews, etc. Features on Starfleet ships, enemies of UFP and a great new comic strip. 32pp, A4, bi-monthly, £10 sub. **"N King," 44 Swans Court, High St, Waltham Cross, Herts EN8 7BH**

Moonwatcher #1
New TV fan-fiction zine: UNCLE, *Robin Of Sherwood, B7, DS9/B5, X-Files/Sapphire And Steel!* Plus Robin Hobb interview. 52pp, A5, £2.50. **"Maria Bennett," 87 Lennox Rd, Chichester, W Sussex PO19 4SZ**

Sufferin' Satellites #1
Dan Dare zine with two good comic strips (one is a *Judge Dredd* crossover!) and interview with Dare artist Don Harley, plus a free Mekon badge! 24pp, A4, £1.50. **"PM Walker," World Apart, 5 Irby Rd, Heswall, Wirrall L61 6UX**

TWK #8
Pratchett zine with all the latest news on everything Discworld. 40pp, A5, quarterly, £2 (£7 sub). **"TWK," 23 Woodland Vale Rd, St Leonard's on Sea, E Suxxes TN37 6JJ**

Universal Exports #1
Good-looking new James Bond zine: the films, the books (Fleming and beyond), the babes, the bad guys and the Gerry Anderson-*Moonraker* connection. 32pp, A5, £1.50. **"Kenny Smith," 15 Burncleuch Ave, Cambuslang, Glasgow G72 8NU**

Universe Today #2
Role-playing game zine which also looks at *Star Wars* and vampires. Plus 6pp supplement "The PBM Pages." 20pp, A4, quarterly, £12 sub. **"Peter Clayton," 2 Green Gables, Eaton Ford, St Neots, Cambs PE19 3SL**

And Don't Forget...
It doesn't cost you anything to advertise your work here, so why not reach zillions of **SFX** *readers across the UK and beyond by sending us your zine with all the usual details (price, size, page count, subs, etc.) and we'll do our best to put it in!*

SFX On Call

Don't forget that for all the most up-to-date science fiction news you can ring the SFX hotline on:

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This line is regularly updated and the hottest source for inside information on all things fantasy and SF. (Legal bit: calls charged at 50p per minute at all times; get permission from whoever pays the phonebill before you call; never pull a plug out with wet hands, eat a big meal before swimming; etc. etc.)

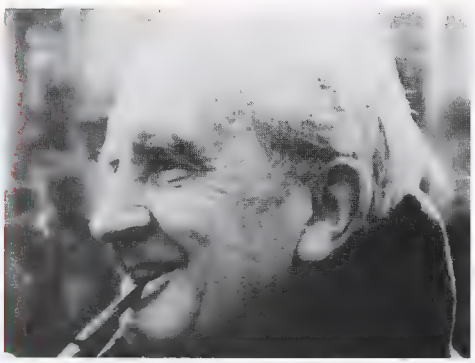
50 of the best!

Announcing the **SFX** Great Books Polls. Here's your opportunity to determine once and for all which are the greatest science fiction and fantasy books ever written.

In November, **SFX** will be revealing a list of the 50 greatest science fiction and fantasy novels, as chosen by you, our discerning readers. So get your thinking caps (or propeller beanies) on and decide what are, in your opinion, the FIVE best SF/fantasy books in history.

Here are the parameters under which we're operating:

- Please list book title & author.
- Books must be science fiction, fantasy or supernatural horror.
- Sorry, but no film/TV tie-ins. Any votes for these will be immediately discounted.
- You can go as far back as you want – *Beowulf* is not only eligible but worth serious consideration!
- Your top book will get five points, your fifth book will get one.
- You can vote on the back of a postcard, or via our Web page at **http://www.sfnet.co.uk**



John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (above) could do well, but John Wyndham Lucas Parkes Beynon Harris is currently leading.

You will no doubt recall that when Waterstones did their Books Of The Century Poll last year, *The Lord Of The Rings* scored a resounding victory, with *1984* in second place. So obviously those are going to be in with a good chance here, but will **SFX** readers' views reflect those of the general public, or are we in for some surprises? Names we expect to see include Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, Wells, Wyndham, Frank Herbert and PK Dick, as well as more current stars like Steve Baxter, Chris Priest and Mike Marshall Smith.

The results will be announced at a special **SFX** event to be held in Bath on Saturday 15 November. As part of National Libraries Week, **SFX** and Bath Central Library will be organising six hours or so of SF-related talks, displays and panels, attended by a bevy of top authors, editors and artists. Moreover, the whole shebang will be completely free. More details next issue.

Send your votes to The **SFX** Great Books Poll, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. (If you need any ideas, take a look at the votes awarded by the **SFX** team below.)

Mike
1 *The End Of The World News* – Anthony Burgess
2 *Frankenstein* – Mary Shelley
3 *The Chrysalids* – John Wyndham
4 *The Time Machine* – HG Wells
5 *Stranger In A Strange Land* – Robert A Heinlein

Anthony
1 *The Trouble With Lichen* – John Wyndham
2 *Use Of Weapons* – Iain Banks
3 *1984* – George Orwell
4 *The Stainless Steel Rat Wants You* – Harry Harrison
5 *The Horse And His Boy* – CS Lewis

Dave
1 *The Chrysalids* – John Wyndham
2 *Way Station* – Clifford D Simak
3 *1984* – Eric Blair (Show off! – Mike)
4 *Pollen* – Jeff Noon
5 *Stranger In A Strange Land* – Robert Heinlein

Guy
1 *The Lord Of The Rings* – JRR Tolkien
2 *The Time Machine* – HG Wells
3 *1984* – George Orwell
4 *The Illustrated Man* – Ray Bradbury
5 *A Wizard Of Earthsea* – Ursula K Le Guin

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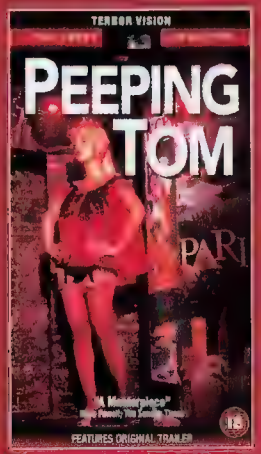

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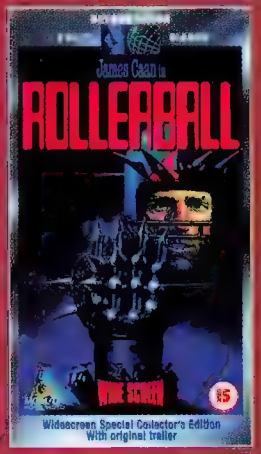

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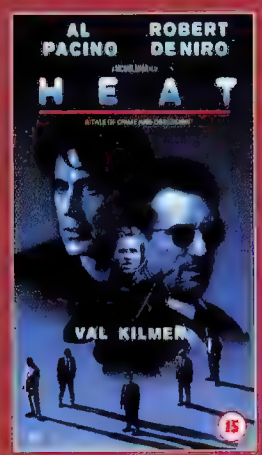

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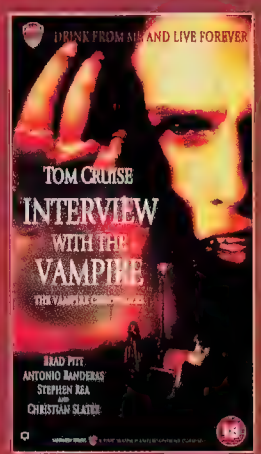

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SFX On-line

Edited by Simon Forrester

Oh Summer. The Net junkie students go home, and everyone else turns off their machines in favour of a quick game of footie in the park. But SFNet still wobbles on bravely, with our readers' reviews of *Batman*, coverage of *Men In Black* (as well as a fairly odd ad) and news of the fourth instalment in the *Alien* saga, *Alien Resurrection* (see below). Meanwhile, SFX's sister site, *Cult-TV*, continues to grow, and now sports an unedited set of interviews with the entire cast of *Babylon 5*. Yes, it's all happening at www.futurenet.com, y'know.

One more thing. SFNet is currently running a home page project – this is a page you can point your browser to by default that'll a) eventually build up into a massive science fiction links page, b) feature a guide to what's new on SFNet, and c) include a top news story.

If you've got a site you'd like us to link to, or any other comments, e-mail them to me at sforrester@futurenet.com.

The '60s Batman had its fair share of enemies, and we're not talking about fans of the original comic...

The World Famous SFX Caption Competition

Another month, another stab at a vaguely original, entertaining or just different piece of introductory blah for the World Famous SFX Caption Competition. The picture this month was of Cesar Romero *et al*, dolled up in their Batvillain gear. And the winning entries were...

Stuff this "Kerpow! Blam! Splat!" nonsense – let's just twat him!

Roger Utting

You mean you still recognise us?! Even with our masks on?

Keith Lawler

Who's that guy in the stupid-looking outfit?

Paul Henshall

(Though it didn't win, Dave insisted that a mention go to Nigel Garvey whose entry was very funny but sadly unprintable.)

But now to the next teaser, this time a quality pic taken from US TV series *Psi-Factor: Chronicles Of The Paranormal...*

NEWSROUND

BABYLON 5

Source:
uk.media.tv.sf.babylon5

One common problem with newsgroups is that they're international – last month's **SFX** detailed a few of the things *Babylon 5* fans did to avoid spoilers, but failed to mention completely avoiding newsgroups (in which some US viewers take great delight revealing details of episodes yet to air in the UK).

Here, then, is a newsgroup especially designed with UK *B5* fans in mind, where willingly ignorant folk can frequent in safety, discussing everything from the state of Boxleitner's haircut and what was really down that big hole to YKWYBRTMUMTSB5W, the most unintelligible acronym ever devised.

TREK VS WARS

Source:
alt.startrek.vs.starwars

Prepare to enter the field where Klingon honour battles against the Dark Side and no-one emerges unscathed. A new addition to the comprehensive set of alt.startrek groups, here's a place (at last!) to settle the score, whether you incline more towards Vader or Worf *et al*. Alternatively, you can wander off into alt.startrek.creative.erotica, which is the weirdest of the lot when it isn't drowning in spam.

Website Of The Month

What's it called?
Alien Resurrection.

What is it?
The official Web promotion machine for the Autumn's biggest cinema event (well, we reckon so), *Alien IV: Alien Resurrection.*

Where is it?
http://www.alien4.com/

What's it like?
Fantastic – Shockwaved up to the gills, the site contains regularly-updated content, such as stills from the movie (a new one each day!), audio, video and text versions of interviews with the film's various actors, a look behind the scenes, an insight into the first three movies, theatrical trailers to download and, ooh, well, tons of stuff, really.

So if you're looking forward to Ripley's return (or if you're Mike, gagging for some new shots of Winona Ryder), this is an unmissable site, beautifully presented (if lacking in regard for Net speeds occasionally) and wonderfully comprehensive. Tops.

Jeunet's Gallic take on the *Alien* mythos hits our shores later this year, but in the meantime take a look at this great site.

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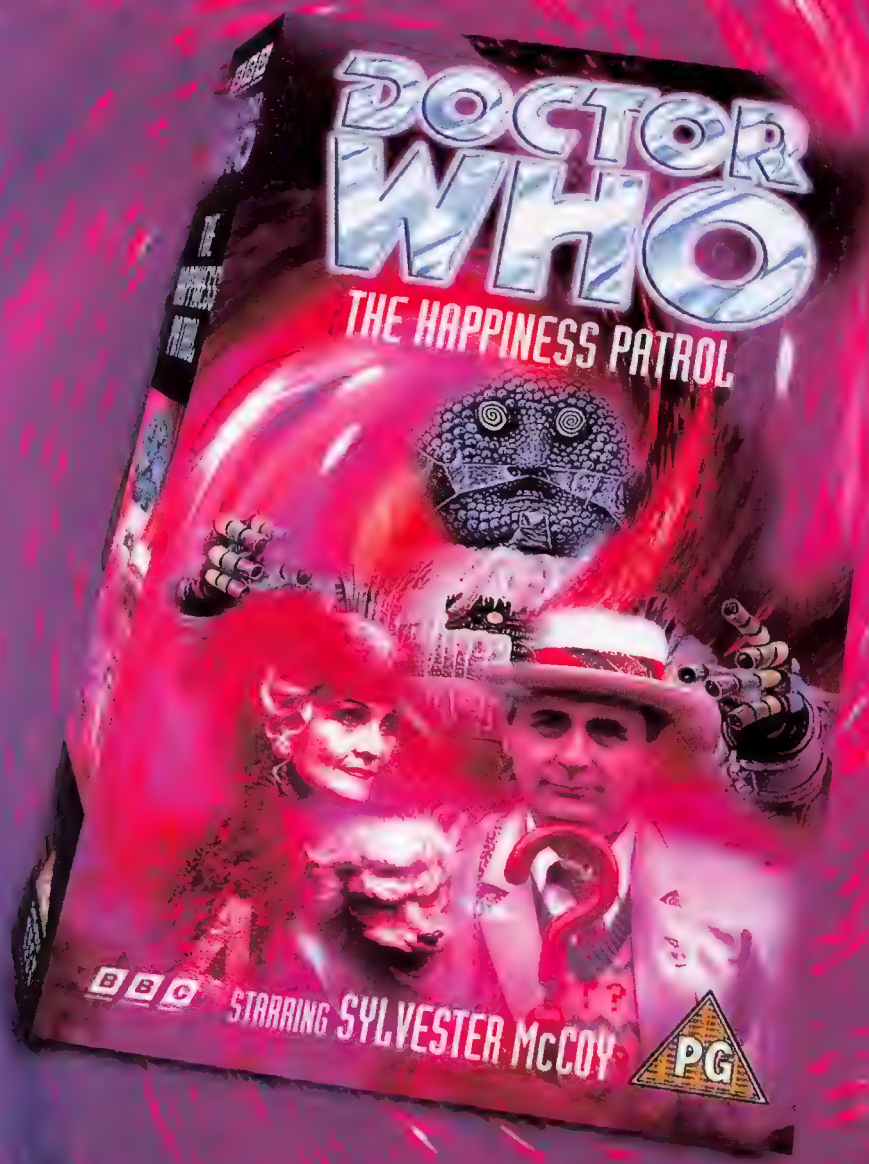
DOCTOR WHO

THE RE-GENERATION...

'BE HAPPY OR DIE!' — watch out for the Kandy Man...



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Incapable Daleks, sad X-pals and SF monikered flora

Scully – a member of the FBI or FBJ – her card can't seem to make up its mind.

Could this man be a secret agent for the US government?

"GET A LIFE!"

Dear **SFX**,
I think I have discovered the secret behind *The X-Files* – Mulder and Scully are fakes.

They are supposed to work for the Federal Bureau Of Investigation, part of the Department Of Justice, right? But in fact if you put your anorak on and freeze-frame the show's title sequence (see above), the ID cards show them to be agents of the Federal Bureau Of Justice, Department Of Investigation. Ha!

Paul Wakeham, Brierly Hill

"DÉJÀ VU?"

Dear **SFX**,
In light of the *Star Wars* hype, I decided to rent the trilogy to check it out again for myself. The last time I saw it was, well, ages ago! And, might I add, it was truly brilliant.

Now I don't know if this has been discussed in your amazing (suck-up, suck-up) mag before, but has anyone else noticed an uncanny similarity between *The X-Files*, the best thing to hit this planet EVER, and *Star Wars? Star Wars* starts with a stolen DAT-tape (or something alike) with classified information on it ("Anasazi," the second season finale perhaps?).

Then you've got Darth Vader. He runs a group with powers beyond our imagination. Could he be Cancer Man in disguise?

Strong male and female leads (Luke and Leia equals Mulder and Scully). Darth Vader turns out to be Luke's father and Leia gets it on with Han Solo. What does the future hold in store for *The X-Files* you cry? Well, Cancer Man will turn out to be Mulder's father and Scully gets nasty with either Krycek or Skinner. Am I off my rocker or has anyone else noticed this too?

Cat Karskens, cyberspace

We'd like to see Scully deny the existence of aliens if she wandered into Jabba's palace. "Sorry, Mulder. We've obviously just walked on to the set of the next Muppets movie." Next month, conclusive proof that The Fifth Element *ripped off* Space Precinct. **Dave**

"PENPALS BAN"

Dear **SFX**,
A request regarding the penpals section of your Sales Of The Uncanny pages. Is there any chance of a ban on ads which start: "Mulder seeks Scully/Scully seeks Mulder?" This sort of thing is occurring almost as often as Brannon Braga writing an incomprehensible episode of *Voyager*. Besides, I wonder if this is precisely what these readers mean – are they really looking for a member of the opposite sex who holds opposing views to them, and with whom there is absolutely zero chance of copping off?

Matthew J Newton, Dorchester

Certainly, it'd be refreshing to see something along the lines of "Luke seeks someone who

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Dear **SFX**,
The actual answer to the question, "How do the Daleks get up the stairs?" is that my dad pushes them. In the last *Doctor Who* story to feature the Daleks ["Remembrance Of The Daleks"], in which they floated up the stairs on a weird video effect light thing, my dad was stood behind them pushing.

I think he feels this has been one of the highlights of his 20 years at the BBC Visual Effects department. What was strange about this particular incident was that the master race of the universe, aside from having to have a BBC technician help them up rather unceremoniously, also had to have the handrail taken off the stairs in the school they were invading because otherwise they couldn't fit in the gap.

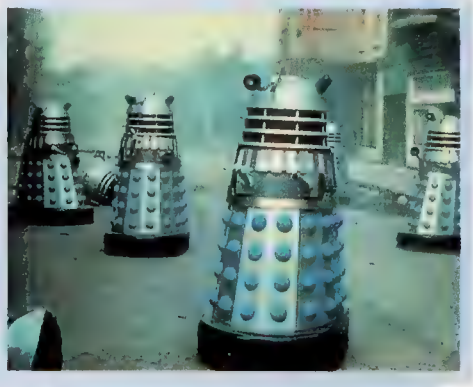
Master race my arse.

Brian Edwards, cyberspace

T-SHIRT WINNER!

That's not as embarrassing as the Mechanoids in the Doctor Who *story "The Chase," who built a giant city with corridors only just wide enough for one of them at a time to negotiate. This results in a side-splitting scene where one Mechanoid has to reverse up a corridor when it meets a neighbour halfway down.* **Dave**

"Typical. It's always when you park your spaceship on the third floor of the multi-storey that the lift breaks down."



TOON TURN-OFF

COSGROVE HALL'S AMBITIOUS DISCWORLD CARTOON GOT THE FANS FROTHING...

"SIX OF THE WORST"

Dear **SFX**,
How to make millions of Discworld fans very annoyed...
1. Take a Pratchett novel.
2. Remove the jokes, the characterization, most of the plot and all of the atmosphere.
3. Ignore the character descriptions in the books and just make them up as you go along.
4. Add some silly West Country accents.
5. Make a documentary attempting to show that Pratchett fans are all sad individuals who wear black/ dress up as the characters, etc.
6 Put it on Sunday at tea-time and then hype it to death.

Rachel, cyberspace

"WYRD IDEAS"

Dear SFX,
Is it just me or is *Wyrd Sisters* going nowhere fast? And could someone please tell me what the main story line is. I can't quite seem to work it out.

Peter Smith, cyberspace

Bizarrely, to date we've not received a single letter defending Cosgrove Hall's Pratchett adaptation. It looks like they've managed to create their first ever critical flop. Which is a big shame, because their version of Truckers *(another* Pratchett *tale) was excellent.* **Dave**

Could *Wyrd Sisters* be the first Cosgrove Hall cartoon to come a cropper?

won't turn out to be his sister"; "Doctor seeks companion who might want something more than a paternal relationship"; "Lwaxana seeks anything in trousers" or "Gorgeous red-head seeks SF magazine editor" for a change. Then again, perhaps not... **Dave**

"FLORA SFXUS"

Dear **SFX**,
Just to let you know... Get down to your local garden centre because a new miniature climbing rose called Captain Scarlet has just gone on sale, complete with matching logo-ed plant pot and the man in red himself on the label. I'm not sure if it's as indestructible, but it looks ideal for someone with a new house. We've just had some come in at the nursery where I work.

Thought it might be a suitable subject for Tosh or even a competition prize.

Are they taking this merchandising thing a bit too far? I've had a look at random to see if there are any other plant cultivars out there with a sci-fi tie in.

And indeed there are... Rhododendrons called Tolkien, Susan (Discworld), Vulcan, Jabberwocky, Hyperion and Goldfinger. They're within four pages of each other in the *Plant Finder* book. There's also a fuschia called Ernest Rankin, a distant relation perhaps? And another called UFO.

Perhaps a garden designed purely for cultivars with a tenuous sci-fi tie-in?

Maurice A Barnes, cyberspace

What, no triffids? **Dave**

All praise to *The Fifth Element!* Or would you be worshipping a false god? The jury is out on Luc Besson's SF extravaganza.

"BESSON DONE GOOD"

Dear **SFX**,
Having seen *The Fifth Element* last week, I am still dumbstruck. I was not expecting such a well-made, classic SF film. Apart from the excellent characters and script, what impressed me most was the film's vision. It successfully portrayed a different image of the future from what we've seen before. We're all familiar with the near-perfect worlds of *Star Trek*. Also, the darker worlds of *Blade Runner* and *Babylon 5*, where we see an "if we don't sort ourselves out this'll happen" kind of future. Then the extremes of the post-apocalyptic worlds of *Mad Max* and *Planet Of The Apes*, and the opposite and even more scarily perfect Nirvana futures from *Demolition Man* and *Bill And Ted*.

The Fifth Element sits nicely in the middle of all these. People still smoke, drink and live, but there are just a lot more of them and a lot more technology trying to overcome the problems of the increased population. In fact, the hero is just an ordinary guy trying to ride the system. He could be taken from any number of modern day films. This actually helps to compensate for the common moralistic side of the story, and enables you to simply enjoy the ride.

I hope Hollywood producers are taking note – a big budget and impressive special effects are all very well, but they're no substitute for a good story and a genuine vision.

Roj Young, cyberspace

There's been a noticeably mixed reaction to The Fifth Element *in our mailbag. The general feeling seems to be that Besson spent so long creating his future world he forgot to write a decent story. But in a Summer where we've had to suffer the plotless drivel of* The Lost World *and* Batman And Robin, The Fifth Element *comes across like pure Tolstoy.* **Dave**

"CLEAN SLATE WHO"

Dear **SFX**,
Your reviewer (**SFX24**) laments the fact that the first in the BBC's new series of *Doctor Who* books immediately diverges from the storyline developed in the Virgin New Adventures, but surely Terrance Dicks had little choice. Also, *Lungbarrow* was written after the TV film was shown, yet deliberately contradicts it.

By choosing to continue to develop some of the more bizarre ideas introduced in earlier New Adventures, particularly the ludicrous Loom business, in their last few books, rather than use them to bring the storyline back towards something more consistent with that established on TV (in both original series and film), the Virgin New Adventures authors guaranteed such divergence in any book that followed on directly from the TV film. They thereby ensured that the New Adventures would be permanently relegated to a non-canonical *cul-de-sac*.

Hopefully, those New Adventures authors writing for the new series will make the most of the clean sheet to drop some of the nonsensical baggage accumulated over the 60-odd New Adventures, and develop a more credible backstory for the Doctor and his people(s).

Helen Hill, Swindon

Lungbarrow *might have been published after the TV movie was shown, but the original script was written years before, and the New Adventures had been dropping hints about the Loom backstory for years. Besides,* Lungbarrow *does have a go at reconciling the Looms with the Doctor having a father in the TV movie... But, yes, Terrance Dicks had little choice – how could he know what was in a book which hadn't been published?* **Anthony**

"OUR MISTEAK"

Dear **SFX**,
So vampires are "most allergic" to holy water, are they? Yeah, that's right. If they're not very careful when they're at the supermarket they might accidentally buy something containing holy water, take it home and eat it, have an allergic reaction where their face goes all puffy, and have to take an antihistamine and lie down.

Martin, cyberspace

They have to check the sell-by date on the stakes as well, don't forget. (Stakes, steaks, geddit? Oh never mind.) **Dave**

THE SFX WAFF BOX

THIS MONTH WE ALSO HEARD FROM THE FOLLOWING READERS OF OUR HUMBLE MAG...

John I Knudsen, cyberspace ("I just wanted you to know that I like **SFX**. A lot.There. Now you know. Bet that brightened your day a bit"); **Jamie Summers**, cyberspace ("I have been reading since issue one and just wanted to congratulate you on the continuing quality of your mag."); **Jonathan Mock**, cyberspace; **Daniel Bosman**, cyberspace; **Maarten Schenk**, cyberspace (annoyed *Space: Above And Beyond* fan); **Dave Salbstein**, cyberspace (afraid we don't know of any *Maxx* videos at the moment); **Keith Power**, cyberspace; **Daniel Ratcliffe**, cyberspace (another annoyed *Space: Above And Beyond* fan); **Jona Zuiver**, Netherlands (yet another annoyed *Space: Above And Beyond* fan); **Iain MacGarrow**, Bromsgrove (and guess what he's a fan of...); **David Atkins** (um, try using a knife); **Alan Wilkinson**, Beaconsfield (who virtually did a review of the *Crime Traveller* boxout in **SFX27**); **Ian Parker**, London (of the Isle Of Man *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society?); **Mark J Howard**, Southport (major Jennifer Lien fan); **Marc Scarff**, Birchington-On-Sea; **DS Aldworth**, London; **Neil Crosby**, Leicester (pining for *Dark Skies*), and many more...

'This man's going to be a major writer' IAIN BANKS

'Watch this man go global' PETER F. HAMILTON

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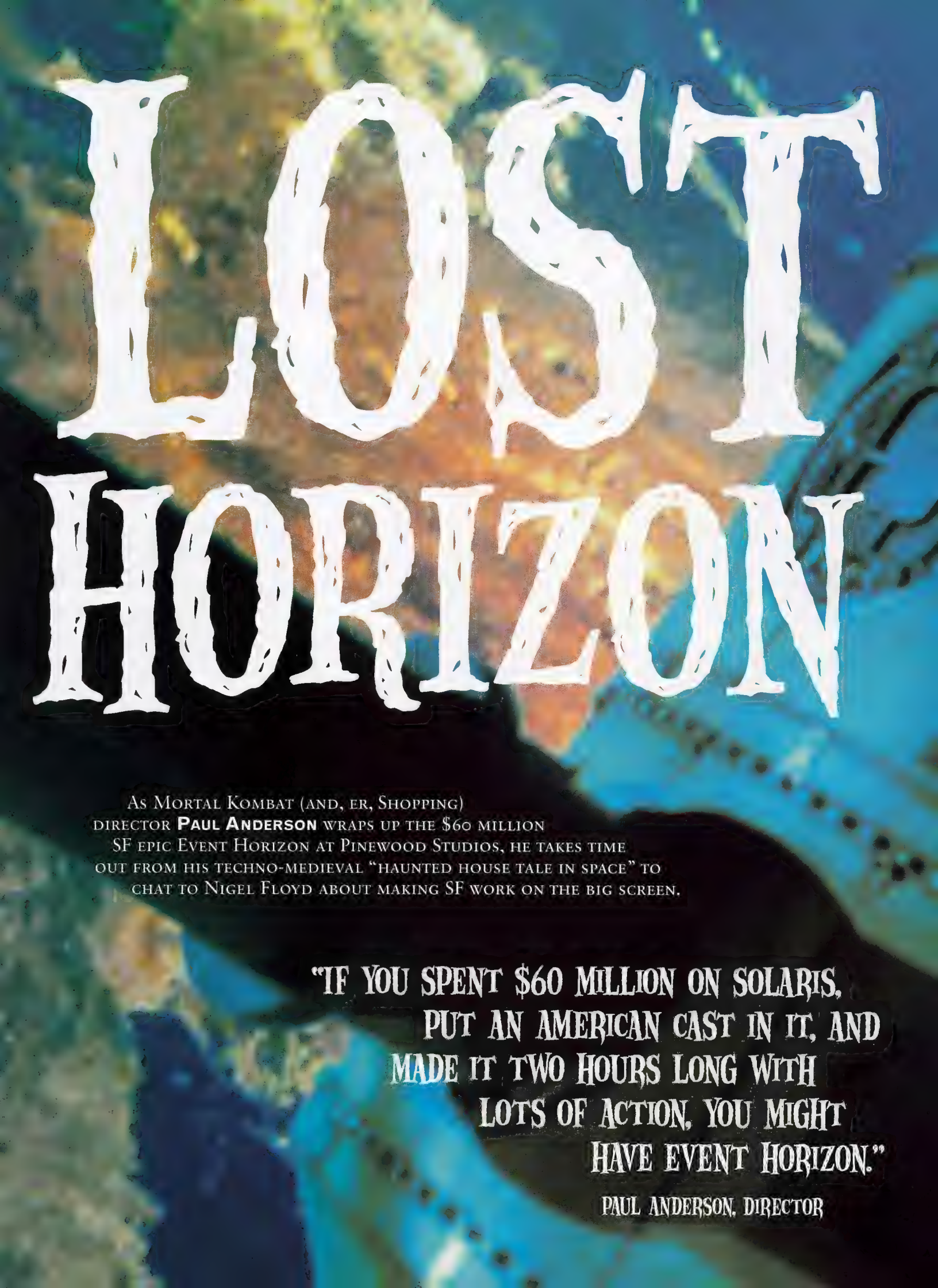
LOST HORIZON

As Mortal Kombat (and, er, Shopping) director **Paul Anderson** wraps up the $60 million SF epic Event Horizon at Pinewood Studios, he takes time out from his techno-medieval "haunted house tale in space" to chat to Nigel Floyd about making SF work on the big screen.



"If you spent $60 million on Solaris, put an American cast in it, and made it two hours long with lots of action, you might have Event Horizon."

Paul Anderson, director

(Top to bottom) Laurence Fishburne lends a helping hand to a crewmate in a spot of bother; there were going to be loads of zero-gravity scenes, but most were cut from the script; William Weir (Sam Neill) emerges from his hydro tank; "Hmm, I'm not sure this is how I'm supposed to disable HAL."

Behind the scenes

Event Horizon

All is not well aboard the spaceship Event Horizon. A jagged, gaping hole has been ripped in its wall, de-pressurising its cabin and causing everything that's not nailed down to be sucked violently out into the vacuum of space. Lashed by the freezing outrush of air, Captain Miller (Laurence Fishburne) clings to a length of cable, desperately trying to avoid the fate suffered by a chair that moments before was catapulted across the bridge, and is now embedded in the metal wall beside the yawning void. Showered with sparks from the short-circuiting electrical wiring, Miller is suspended in mid-air as he tries to drag himself toward the safety of an air-lock door at the other end of the cabin...

Having been lowered to the ground and disentangled from the wires that held him aloft, Laurence Fishburne dusts himself down and wanders over to the monitor at the side of the Pinewood set, where *Event Horizon* director Paul Anderson is already calling for an instant replay of the action. Completely unfazed by the experience, and with fake blood still oozing from his ears, Fishburne is introduced briefly on his way past, taking the time to shake hands and say, "Good to meet you. Have a good one, man."

Shot with three different cameras running at a variety of speeds, one of them hand-held, but each one covering a different angle, the scene inevitably looks less impressive on the tiny monitor screen. But having scrutinised the different versions, Anderson declares himself satisfied with the results, so the crew immediately start preparing for the next shot – a reverse angle of the same action, seen from the point of view of the air-lock. However, since the shot will take the best part of an hour to set-up and light, there's time to find a quiet corner and ask the director a little more about the $60 million dollar SF movie he's currently two-thirds of the way through filming.

His check shirt hanging loose over black chinos, the 31 year old Anderson is an engaging blend of cool professionalism and fanboy enthusiasm. Born in Newcastle, Anderson cut his directing teeth on the controversial ram-raiding movie *Shopping*, before making his mark in the States with the best film yet made from a computer game, *Mortal Kombat*. The step up to *Event Horizon* is a big one, but Anderson is taking it all in his stride, despite a punishing shooting schedule, a hefty $10 million dollar effects budget, and the formidable presence of Laurence Fishburne, veteran of such movies as *Apocalypse Now!*, *Boyz 'N The Hood* and the Tina Turner bio-pic *What's Love Got To Do With It?*

Watching him work, it's easy to see why New Line Pictures, after having only seen a few minutes of early footage, were confident enough in Anderson's ability to extend the film's post-production schedule, increase the effects budget, and give him the space to make what he wanted all along.

An avid science fiction fan, Anderson's conversation is littered with references to

Less of an *Alien* rip-off and more of a ghost movie in space, according to director Paul Anderson.

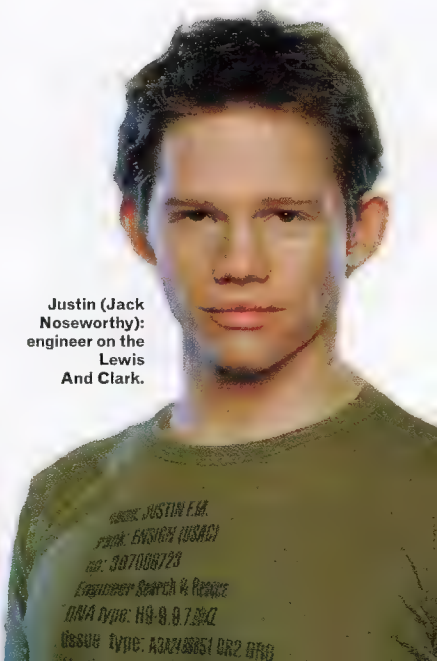
"LAURENCE [FISHBURNE] IS ONE OF THE FEW ACTORS WHO'LL LET YOU HANG HIM FROM WIRES, SET HIM ON FIRE, HALF-DROWN HIM AND BASH HIM INTO THINGS..."

PAUL ANDERSON, DIRECTOR

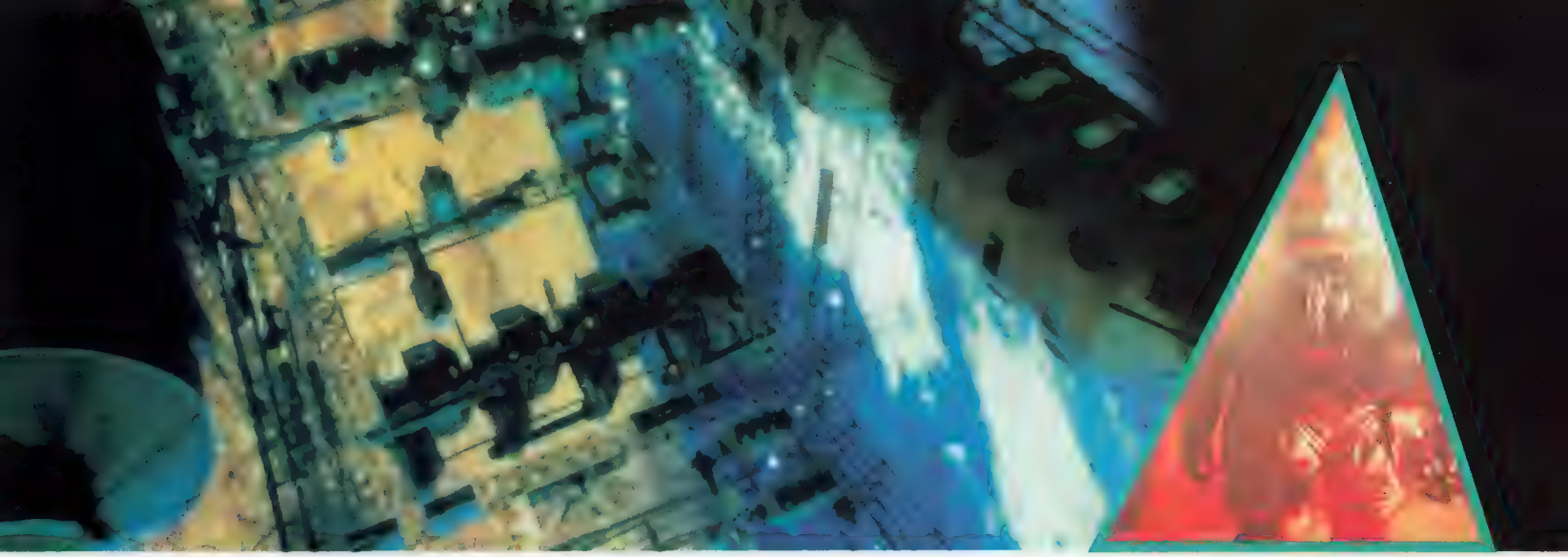
SO, WHO DO YOU RECKON WILL SURVIVE THE MOVIE?

Captain Miller (Laurence Fishburne): commanding officer of the Lewis And Clark.

Starck (Joely Richardson): navigator on the Lewis And Clark.



Justin (Jack Noseworthy): engineer on the Lewis And Clark.



classic genre movies such as *2001*, *Star Wars* or the *Alien* trilogy, which he loves and admires, but has no desire to slavishly copy.

He describes *Event Horizon* as a "haunted house movie in space," and is obviously delighted to be offering a new riff on the conventions of the genre. It's a spin reflected in the film's design – all bright, futuristic hi-tech and grim Gothic gloom (or as the film-makers would have it, "techno-medieval").

First off, what's *Event Horizon* about?

"In a nutshell, it's a classic haunted house movie, but the twist is that it's set in space. The pattern is very much a movie like Robert Wise's *The Haunting* or Kubrick's *The Shining*, but instead of the big haunted house on the hill, or the Overlook Hotel, we have the Event Horizon, a labyrinthine spaceship a mile and a half long. The Event Horizon, the most expensive spaceship ever built, goes on its maiden voyage, disappears, and is presumed lost with all hands. It stays missing for seven years, but then reappears floating off Neptune; it sends out one garbled distress message to Earth and then goes silent.

"A search and rescue team lead by Captain Miller [Laurence Fishburne] and the ship's creator, Dr William Weir [Sam Neill], is dispatched to salvage the Event Horizon and rescue whatever may be left of the crew. But when they get there, the lights are off and nobody's home; it's like boarding the Marie Celeste, the crew have all disappeared but there's no evidence that the lifeboats have been used. So the question is, 'Where did they go and why?'

(Above) The Lewis And Clark sets out from the Daylight station orbiting Earth on a rescue mission. (Right, top to bottom) How to combat freezing and exploding at the same time; Richard T Jones as Cooper; gruesome scenes a-plenty; the "eye"-shaped corridors.

"There have been hints that what follows has similarities to a film often referred to as 'The Russian *2001*,' Andre Tarkovski's *Solaris*? There's a little bit of truth in that – the major themes of *Solaris* and the major themes of *Event Horizon* are similar. However, there's also a major difference, in that *Solaris* is a serious art film, while *Event Horizon* definitely is not. If you spent $60 million on *Solaris*, put an American cast in it, and made it two hours long with lots of action, you might have *Event Horizon*."

Could you expand a little on the "haunted house in space" idea?

"What's fascinating about the salvage crew's situation is their isolation. I don't find haunted house movies particularly scary anymore. In the 19th century those haunted houses would have been miles away from anywhere – you're isolated, you're alone and you're in danger. Nowadays, you're never far away from anyone. Everyone's got a mobile phone so how fucking dangerous can it be? But these people

Smith (Sean Pertwee – yep, Jon's son): pilot of the Lewis And Clark.

Peters (Kathleen Quinlan): emergency technician on the Lewis And Clark.

GOTHIC SPLENDOUR

PRODUCTION DESIGNER **JOSEPH BENNETT** WAS DETERMINED TO GIVE EVENT HORIZON A UNIQUE VISUAL STYLE, BUT ALSO A BELIEVABLE ONE, DISCOVERS DAVE HUGHES.

The first clue to the visual style of *Event Horizon* comes from the outfit British production designer Joseph Bennett is wearing for our interview. Topping off his country gentleman look – smart, comfortable slacks, casual shirt and deliberately styled blond hair – is an unmistakably fashionable lizardskin jacket which lends him the air of a cross between *The Movie Show*'s Richard Jobson and *Wild At Heart*'s Nic Cage. Judging from the elaborate sets constructed for the $45 million film at Pinewood Studios, Bennett's designs are an equally effective mix of traditional and radical styling appropriate for a film which, intentionally or otherwise, may prove a rewrite of the *modus operandi* of sci-fi movie design.

Sitting at a Soho restaurant across the road from where he used to live prior to buying and converting a church deep in the West Country, Bennett seems strangely unable to recall much of his background. Indeed, when I select items from his *resumé*, his brow furrows, as though I've dragged up some long-forgotten detail from his past.

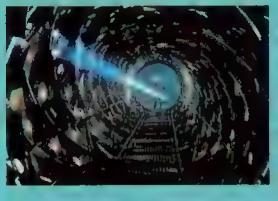
Bennett's history prior to his extended sojourn on *Event Horizon* included production design for Richard Stanley's sci-fi efforts, *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*, for which there was plenty of enthusiasm to go around, but little in the way of budget. Nevertheless, Bennett found working with Stanley – with whom he vaguely recalls working on a music video – more than just financially rewarding. "Richard's great to work with, especially for a designer because he actually lets you be quite free, in a sense." Despite the inherent budgetary limitations of those films, he adds, "he gives you quite a big range, which is obviously very interesting."

After *Dust Devil*, Bennett would go from imagining the future to recreating the past, designing sets for Michael Winterbottom's acclaimed period piece *Jude*, and Iain Softley's '60s drama *Backbeat*. Then director Paul Anderson sent him Philip Eisner's script for *Event*

Captain Miller contemplates moodily in an almost church cloistere-style set

"GIGER CAN LOOK FANTASTIC BUT THE TROUBLE IS THAT IT CAN LOOK A BIT LIKE DESIGN FOR DESIGN'S SAKE."

JOSEPH BENNETT, PRODUCTION DESIGNER



Designer Joseph Bennett made generous use of repeated geometric shapes in his visualisation of *Event Horizon's* future hardware.

are out there at the far-flung reaches of our solar system. We make a big thing about the epic journey out to Neptune, and the fact they've never attempted a rescue this far out before. So they're totally alone, and I think that sense of isolation puts the scariness back into the scenario."

Is the threat an actual physical entity, or does it exist, as in *Solaris*, within the minds of the crew members?

"It's a psychological horror that, depending on how you view it, either becomes flesh or not. Even in a haunted house movie you're never quite sure whether the apparitions are real, or if the visitors brought the ghosts to the house with them, whether they're a projection of their own psychological problems. Or perhaps the house is possessed, and it's feeding off their disturbed psyches. It's a classic theme in a lot of horror pictures. For example, in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, is the Overlook Hotel haunting Jack Nicholson or is Jack Nicholson haunting the Overlook Hotel?"

Looking around this set, I'm struck by production designer Joseph Bennett's fusion of inky Gothic and bright, futuristic hi-tech.

"We wanted the design concept for the *Event Horizon* itself to be something really different – not just another *Blade Runner* or *Alien* clone. And what Joseph and I came up was what we called 'techno-medieval.' When the lights are on it looks very *2001*, very hi-tech; but when the lights go off, you feel like you're in Torquemada's torture chamber, or some gloomy dungeon somewhere. So we went for a lot of medieval flared pillars, but done in metal rather than stone.

"There are a lot of religious shapes here. In fact, the entire ship is built on a cruciform,

"JUST IMAGINE, SEVEN YEARS AFTER IT SINKS, THE TITANIC SAILS INTO NEW YORK HARBOUR. BUT EVERYONE WHO WAS ON BOARD IS MISSING..."

PAUL ANDERSON, DIRECTOR

Horizon. What were his first impressions? "I thought it was an incredibly exciting script, and talking to Paul, I felt the design aspect could be very interesting and challenging. But also there was a great scientific background to it. I was trained as a scientist, so it was the pure physics aspect of it that interested me to an extent. But it was also the psychological aspect – the way that there was a kind of warping of space and time which warps [the protagonists'] heads, so that it became a sort of internal game; an *Alien* film without the alien."

Was Bennett daunted by the number of SF films – *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and, most recently, *The Fifth Element* – which have attempted to define a new look for the genre? "I think it's challenging to work in the SF field and try to come up with something fresh and new," he agrees, "but *Event Horizon* is only set 50 years into the future, which isn't that far ahead, and we've actually pushed it a bit further than maybe it was in the script. It's more Gothic; more exciting visually than if we had just said, 'Well, what would things really look like 50 years from now?'"

Indeed, Bennett elected not to go back and research seminal sci-fi films in order to obtain the right look for the film. "My first step in the research was to look at contemporary machines and scientific apparatus – cyclotrons and turbines, and so on – to see how they look, and try to think how they might look 50 years from now. One of the other areas in which we tried to be realistic," he continues, "was when we tried to think about what would really happen when someone went into space, and were physically exposed to a vacuum. Basically, you explode and freeze at the same time! That was one of the effects that we looked at, to imagine what that might actually look like. So it's kind of visceral as well, more so than a lot of haunted house movies."

Bennett's "techno-medieval" designs are reflected in this almost church-like chamber.

"THE SHIP WAS DESIGNED TO LOOK LIKE A FLYING MAUSOLEUM OR A CHURCH MADE BY AN OBSESSIVE HAND."

JOSEPH BENNETT, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

THE FILM'S "HARD SCIENCE" – WHICH Bennett describes with an arched eyebrow as "spurious" – also enabled the designer and his team to imagine how the technology featured in the film might actually be like. "What would a machine powered by a black hole look like? How would the thing that contains that energy look?" he wondered. "So I researched cyclotrons and proton accelerators to try and get visual references, and took a couple of photographs. [Some] would be made completely of metal, for instance, so that they could contain these particles. Others were sort of scaly, simply because of the massive number of electromagnets needed to produce the energy. One of the things I found with the machines I looked at is that they're all about repetitive shapes – one little thing repeated thousands of times. They're fantastically beautiful things, just because they have – I don't know – 10,000 lenses or something. And I found that quite inspiring, the idea of repetition on a massive scale, [and] making it decorative by using single things over and over again."

This idea is most vividly rendered in the interior of the film's titular spacecraft, the seemingly endless corridors which are each made up of thousands upon thousands of individual components. "Because it's a haunted house story, we wanted the idea that the ship is seeing you at all times, and that it knows what's going on. So, for instance, that corridor was developed out of a basic 'eye' shape. It all helps to give the impression that the ship is alive."

As for the Event Horizon's exterior, Bennett says that he chose a design he likes to call "techno-medieval." "It was designed to look like a sort of flying mausoleum or church," he explains animatedly, "made by an obsessive hand. This thing is a mile long, so we were trying to introduce elements of insectoid shapes, scales, and armour plating..." This radical approach, he says, was inspired by the Gothic nature of the script itself. "A lot of these things were suggested by the script," he admits. "There are all these references to gods and devils, and all these subtexts which I think were really interesting." For example? "Well, the Event Horizon was an experimental ship that disappeared for seven years," he explains, "and there are supposed to be seven circles of hell. And you go through these doors, and each door takes you to another layer of the Abyss, and it all comes back to your own personal Hell."

Bennett's "techno-medieval" styling for *Event Horizon* may well prove to be as popular in future SF movie production design as HR Giger's patented "bio-mechanical" style appropriated by Ridley Scott for *Alien*. "The bio-mechanical approach of people like Giger can look fantastic, but the trouble is that it can look a bit like design for design's sake. You know, why would you build something like that? You've got to have a scientific basis to build things a certain way." But doesn't he feel that his own "techno-medieval" styling might stray in that direction? "It's a fine line, isn't it?" he admits. "If you go too far, it could suddenly look like a bit of a joke. But," he adds, eyes blazing, "if you get it right, it could look awesome!"

Like many of those who have worked on *Event Horizon*, Bennett found his collaboration with director Paul Anderson both inspirational and rewarding. "He was great, he really was. He was very clear about what he wanted, but at the same time he wanted my involvement, and wanted to push me further. It's great working with directors like that, because everything's always, 'How could this be better? How could we make things a bit more exciting?' It was interesting to work on a genre film and be able to subvert and refresh it in a way."

Audiences will find out on Friday 22 August which side of the fine line between "a bit of a joke" and "awesome" Bennett's designs actually falls, but whatever the outcome, it's reassuring that not everyone designing for near-future SF films count a video viewing of *Blade Runner* as the full extent of their research.

The ship interiors were given a very Gothic feel, but Bennett didn't want it to appear "over-designed."

just as cathedrals are. I sat down at the computer with the designer, and we actually built a 3D model of it using elements of the Notre Dame in Paris. We scanned in the cathedral and then created the ship's superstructure in the shape of stained glass windows and other Gothic features – the thrusters were built out of its towers."

Despite this, you seem to have gone for a realistic rather than fantastical vision of what space travel will be like in the year 2046. The spacesuit hanging in the corner over there is quite bulky and uncomfortable-looking.

"Yes, we wanted to get away from the fantasy idea that in 50 years' time space travel is going to be easy, with everyone wearing zip-suits and eating out of Tupperware. Space travel, in this movie, is difficult. We wanted to convey the idea that going into space is a very difficult, dirty, dangerous job, and the look of the salvage ship, the Lewis And Clark, reflects that. It's a cross between what the space shuttle looks like now and the interior design of rescue helicopters, because when you look at the space shuttle from the outside, it looks quite hi-tech, all gleaming and white; but when you get inside, it's all knobs and buttons, with exposed clusters of electrical wiring and pipes all over the place. It looks as if it's still under construction, and we tried to make the Lewis And Clark feel like that. So it's quite dirty and grimy, with a very lived-in feel."

That also makes the Lewis And Clark, visually at any rate, completely different from the Event Horizon. Was that contrast something you wanted to emphasise?

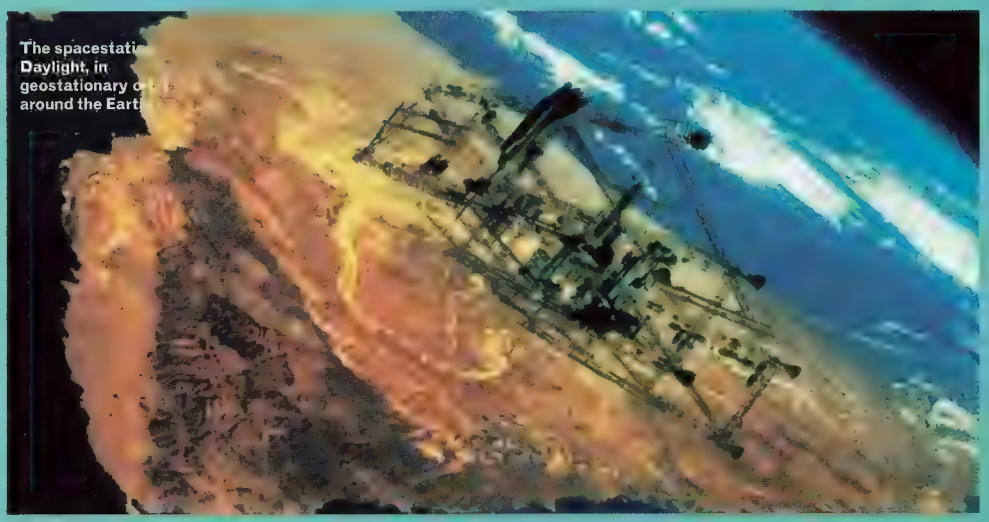
"Yes, because I'm a big fan of movies that change. For instance, I love *Star Wars*, which starts out all orange and yellow, because Luke's on the desert planet, but which by the end has become all blues and blacks. Also,

"IT'S GOT TO THE POINT NOW WHERE A LOT OF ACTORS AND DIRECTORS FROM OUR GENERATION ARE IN A POSITION WHERE THEY CAN MAKE THEIR OWN BIG SF MOVIES."

PAUL ANDERSON, DIRECTOR

BROADENING THE HORIZON

WITH 2001 AND THE ABYSS UNDER EFFECTS SUPERVISOR **RICHARD YURICICH**'S BELT, HOW DIFFICULT COULD EVENT HORIZON BE? VERY, AS HE TELLS DAVE HUGHES.

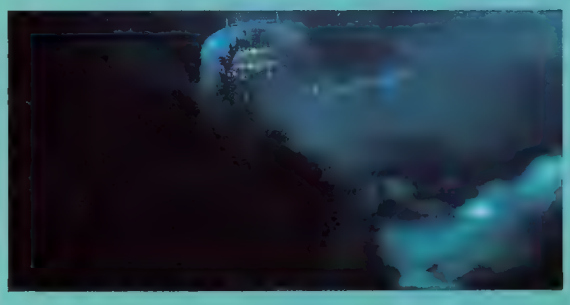


On one of the six sound stages at Pinewood Studios housing *Event Horizon*, veteran visual effects supervisor Richard Yuricich squints into a monitor, watching smoke billow and eddy around a set, trying to mentally match it with shots already filmed and digital effects yet to be added.

The shot, described on the marker boards as "Peters falls for Danny," seems simple enough from its one-line description in the script: *"The hull breach causes a canister to be sucked out into space."* But the complexity of the shot, which may last a second or two in the final film, requires Yuricich and his team to combine as many as a dozen separate elements, many of which have been filmed on a different day, on a different stage, or even in a different part of the world. Some of the elements going into the shot were filmed "live": the smoke which gives the shot atmosphere, the actors, the camera move following the trajectory of the canister as it's sucked out of the breach in the hull, the full-scale portion of the hull exterior, the "live" canister carried through by a member of the crew and the miniature of the ship. The rest will be added digitally: the impact points of the canister as it strikes the walls, the pieces of window shattered and sucked out into space, the canister itself, the ship exterior featuring the planet Neptune and the light from the canister reflected on the walls...

"THE FX ARE JUST THE GLUE TO KEEP THE STORY TOGETHER."

RICHARD YURICICH, VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR



The ship that the crew of the Lewis And Clark is searching for – the experimental light-drive craft Event Horizon which went missing.

"The canister's going to break away from that wall," Yuricich explains, gesturing towards the set with the plaster cast he's worn since falling down during the first week of shooting, "hit a table that was here before, bounce up from the table, bounce across, hit the corner of this big light which is going to blow, hit a chair and knock it over, burst through the glass, come past the camera and finish up outside. Of course, in reality, it would just be sucked straight outside, but we wanted to give the audience something to see." He watches

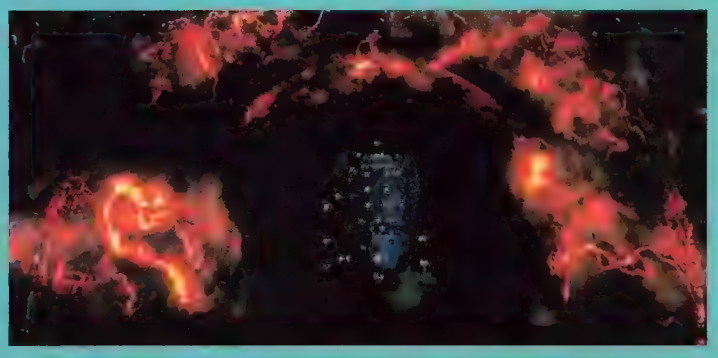
as a sullen man with a canister held high over his head walks through the smoke, manoeuvring the canister around the impact points Yuricich has described. "He's walking the canister through so that we can see how it interacts with the light. Yesterday, we did a similar walk through, but now I've seen the smoke, I realise the canister is going to reflect differently, so we're having to do it again."

Such fiddly details – not to mention the sprained wrist – are just some of the problems Yuricich's having while working on *Event Horizon*. Luckily, the effects *maestro* has worked on a few "problem" shoots in his time, having started out as an uncredited special effects artist on *2001: A Space Odyssey* before working on such seminal science fiction films as *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, *Blade Runner* and *The Abyss*. During this time, Yuricich, who also helped create some mind-boggling moments in last year's *Mission: Impossible*, was partnered with effects genius Douglas Trumbull in a company which effectively invented the Disney-pioneered simulator rides.

Yuricich also found himself too busy to work on Spielberg's "riotous comedy," *1941*. "Actually, not working on that movie is my only regret," he says. "It wasn't received too well," he understates, "but I sort of like it."

Ironically, what originally attracted Yuricich to *Event Horizon* was one of the elements which would ultimately undergo a great deal of reworking as writer Philip Eisner – and, for a time, *Seven* scripter Andrew Kevin Walker – went through various drafts of the script. "The film started out a little heavier in the area of zero gravity," he explains, "and that was probably where most of my attention was focused. I was real excited about the opportunity to work with Paul Anderson and [producer] Jeremy Bolt, who wanted to do zero gravity which could be rated with *2001* and *Apollo 13*. You take a look at the zero gravity that was required in those two films, and [they're] the best. So it was a challenge for all of us to focus on that. Then, to my surprise – I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised – because of the changes in the storyline, all of the zero gravity scenes went. And when that happened, all the rest of it came to the fore."

In other words, as Yuricich himself admits, what started out as an SF film evolved into something quite different – a scary, haunted house flick which director Anderson has described as "*The Shining* in space." "It's not the kind of story that I'm really attracted to, but it's been real fun watching Paul carry it forward. He's got a lot of energy and a lot of ideas, and we're having a rough time keeping up with him."



"IT'S NOT THE KIND OF STORY I'M REALLY ATTRACTED TO, AS IT'S EVOLVED, BUT IT'S BEEN REAL FUN."

RICHARD YURICICH, VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR

FOR ALL OF HIS EXPERIENCE, YURICICH says that *Event Horizon* probably represents the largest film he's been personally responsible for. "The scale of the sets is grand, [and] we've got six of them in the film being done with visual effects," he says, "which hopefully you won't notice, but you might stop to think, 'Good grief, there are no stages 700 or 800 feet long! I wonder where they built that?' So half of our visual effects are going into that sort of thing," adding that two-fifths of the budget is ear-marked for his department... "We've had three or four other stages going on, all with visual effects: one stage where we're doing motion-control, one where we have miniatures against a green screen..."

Among the specific shots Yuricich has worked on are a scene in which one of the film's spaceships – he won't say which one for fear of spoiling the story – explodes in space. "The last two weeks we've blown up around 12 elements which will be used over and over in exploding the ship," he explains. "And since the ship is larger than a mile and can't fit on the screen at any one time, you have to pay attention to the scale. Also, we just finished a shot where we had to do a burning man walking into a set of the flooded second containment area which required a number of elements, and we are about to set up some other stages which will last for about three weeks and which I will direct and photograph. We've got Bob Keen's Image Animation making the skin that we're gonna burn, as well as a prosthetic torso which is going to be rotating as the camera moves into the mouth of a prosthetic man. There's a major miniatures build – we have two spacecraft involved which are very important, and although they're located in an impossible orbit in Neptune space, it's a movie, so we buy it. We've got a great crew of British miniatures builders, and we're building them right alongside the stages..."

Despite all this, Yuricich is hesitant to call *Event Horizon* a special effects movie. "The visual effects done on this film are just the glue to put the story together," he explains. "Above all, it's a scary film. It could have happened in a boat floating down the river or in a hotel in Colorado. It just happens to be in space, which gives more of a feeling of unreality to it. I wouldn't call it a special effects film. It's really about acting and drama."

Equally challenging is the fact that hundreds of the effects shots will be "fixes" which, if accomplished successfully, will be totally invisible to the audience – a situation which reminds Yuricich of his work on another recent film, *Under Seige II*. "There were 625 shots in that which had some degree of visual effects in them, but only about 20 of them are noticeable in the finished film. For example, there are 40 minutes of action on a train, but only about two minutes were shot on a real moving train. The other 38 minutes or so were done on a green screen stage. Of course, that went unnoticed."

Despite the enormous effects crew working under Yuricich on *Event Horizon*, the effects maestro is keen to point out that, above all, the film belongs to the director. "If you take a look at *Blade Runner*, *2001* or *Close Encounters*, there's no way you could call them anything other than a director's film," he says. "What we've got here is a Paul Anderson film. You just try your best and hope that something comes out the way the director wants it, you get the feedback and you move along. Luckily, Paul Anderson has a great understanding of visual effects."

In fact, Yuricich so enjoyed working with Anderson he's already agreed to act as effects supervisor on the director's next project, *Soldier*, based on a script by David Webb Peoples (*Blade Runner*, *12 Monkeys*) and set to star Keanu Reeves. Not that Yuricich was exactly dazzled by the script, initially. "I didn't care for it at all," he confesses. "I told Paul I didn't like it and he said, 'Richard, look at it this way,' and he went into an explanation of how he saw it. And when he had finished I had a big smile on my face and said, 'Oh yeah, shit, that makes sense. I'll do it!'"

The effects – like the set designs – often evoke religious imagery.

you have lots of ragged, jagged, dusty surfaces to start with, but by the end, it's all gleaming and cool inside the Death Star. And that's what we tried to do with this movie: it starts out like *2001*, with a very realistic vision of space travel, and then gradually becomes something completely different, this very dark, atmospheric Gothic horror movie."

Was that something that appealed to you when you first read Philip Eisner's script?

"Yes, it was, although my initial reaction was actually quite negative. I read the first five pages and I thought, 'I don't want to do this movie. I've seen it all before. I know exactly what this movie going to be.' But by the time I was 25 pages in, it was like, 'What the fuck is going on?' Because Philip is terribly clever, he took a lot of standard science fiction set-ups and he let you think you knew exactly what was going to happen. And then he did something completely different, which for a genre audience is going to be fantastic, because it's really going to subvert their expectations."

I gather that Sam Neill's character, Dr William Weir, has his own reasons for wanting to unravel the mystery of the Event Horizon's disappearance?

"Yes, Dr Weir basically created the Event Horizon. At the time of its launch, the Event Horizon was like the Titanic, the biggest and most technologically advanced ship ever built. Then it went off on its maiden voyage and it 'sunk,' which instantly turned Weir from a hero into a pariah. For seven years he's been an outcast, doing boring work in the technological equivalent of Siberia...

"So at the beginning, Weir's quite tortured and a little bit lost; his wife died during that period and his life basically collapsed. Then the Event Horizon reappears and it's his chance for redemption, to prove that he didn't fuck up. It's a lot like the Titanic sailing into New York harbour, and everyone saying, 'You know what, it didn't sink.' That was very much the model for the script: just imagine, seven years after it sinks, the Titanic sails into New York harbour. But everyone who was on board is missing."

The casting of Laurence Fishburne as Captain Miller is intriguing. He's a fine actor, but not one you'd normally associate with science fiction or horror movies.

"Well, first, I'm a huge admirer of Laurence's work. And, second, especially during the '80s, science fiction has not been the genre of great acting. So that's why we took a lot of care when we were casting. The salvage crew on the Lewis And Clark is very tight; there's only eight people, so you don't have the sprawling mass you had in *Alien*^{3}, where there's 50 bald-headed guys running around and you can't tell who's who. There's only eight characters, and we went to great lengths to make sure they were played by actors who would bring those roles to life.

"I also like unexpected choices, and, as you say, Laurence is not the first person you'd picture in space with a gun, fighting aliens. So that's exactly why we went for him."

(Top to bottom) "Oh no, not that Gina G album again!"; director Paul Anderson (sitting) previously helmed *Shopping* and *Mortal Kombat*; what starts out as a rescue mission soon turns into a nightmare; "The director promised that none of us would have a phallic monster bursting out of our chests."

"YOU DON'T HAVE THE SPRAWLING MESS YOU HAD IN ALIEN^3..."

PAUL ANDERSON, DIRECTOR

He's not afraid to do his own stunts, is he?

"No, he's pretty fearless. One of the great fallacies about film-making is that actors do their own stunts. Mostly, they're telling great big porky pies. But Laurence is one of the few actors I've come across who'll let you hang him from wires, set him on fire, half-drown him, and bash him into things. We've gone about as far as we can without breaking his bones, but he's always good-natured and never complains about having to do it again and again.

"One of things that is going to mark out the action in this movie is that you're going to be able to see that it's really Laurence doing these amazing stunts. It's not the usual thing where you have a wide shot of the stunt man followed by a cut to a close-up of the actor with his hair being blown by a wind machine and a few sparks going off in the background. Laurence is in the inferno, and the action scenes are so much better because of that."

A lot of the effects shots will be added afterwards, but how aware are you of the time constraints, while you're actually filming?

"Actually, the majority of the effects shots will be well underway by the time we finish filming. We're locking effects sequences and turning them over to the effects people as soon as we can, so they'll have more time. A lot of the big effects movies that are released nowadays, *Judge Dredd* was the last example, look half-finished. And you think, 'It's an $80-90 million movie, why on Earth would it not have good digital effects shots in it?'

"That's why on this movie, as soon as we've shot material that involves effects, I get in the editing room whenever I can and start cutting the sequences together with the editor. Then I say, 'Okay, these are the 100 frames we're actually going to use in the movie. I'm going to lock myself down to that now, so start adding the effects.'"

Stanley Kubrick is at this moment shooting *Eyes Wide Shut* here at Pinewood. Have you seen or heard anything?

"No, but Tom Cruise turned up the other day, just to see what we were doing. I was talking to him about *Eyes Wide Shut* and he was saying how much he loves science fiction. He's roughly the same age as me, so he also grew up with *Star Wars* and an insane love of SF movies. I think it's got to the point now where a lot of the actors and directors from our generation are finally in a position of power where they can make their own big science fiction movies. And they're really getting their rocks off doing it."

Event Horizon *will go on general release in the UK on Friday 22 August. Full review next issue.*

SFX Presents

The Spoiler Zone

TOP SECRET

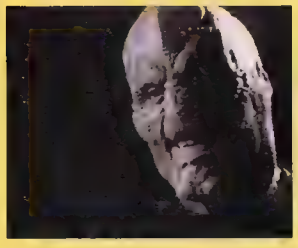
Cliffhanger reviews & Autumn previews

This month, the latest US news from Babylon 5 Third Rock The Outer Limits Deep Space Nine Voyager Sliders Hercules...

The Spoiler Zone

TOP SECRET

***Babylon 5* and *Deep Space Nine* have both taken a break for the Summer, leaving their crews waiting in hope... But we've got details of the conclusions, not to mention a sneak preview of two of this Autumn's SF contenders...**



KEY
Season A, B, C etc... (for season one, two, three, etc...) Episode number 1, 2, 3 etc...

Important: Text in italics reveals extra-sensitive plot points.

After the action-packed "Face Of The Enemy" brings a season's worth of plot to a conclusion, "Intersections In Real Time" takes a more measured approach...

Babylon 5

D17 The Face Of The Enemy

(417: 9 June 1997)
Written by: J Michael Straczynski
Directed by: Mike Vejar
Guest cast: William Edgars (Efrem Zimbalist Jr); Lise Hampton-Edgars (Denise Gentle); Bester (Walter Koenig); Number One (Marjorie Monaghan); Psi-Cop (Harlan Ellison); Captain Edward MacDougan (Richard Gant); Wade (Mark Schneider); Captain James (David Purdham); Allison Higgins (Diana Morgan); Captain Leo Frank (Ricco Ross)

On the Red Planet, Franklin and Lyta take charge as a number of cryo-frozen telepaths are smuggled into Resistance headquarters, despite Number One's hatred of all telepaths. Psi-Corps have conducted brain-destroying scans on suspected Resistance members in the past...

The White Star fleet presses on towards Earth, persuading increasing numbers of Earth Alliance vessels to join the rebellion, while Garibaldi and Edgars hatch their plans. Arranging the arrest of Sheridan's father, they contact the captain and offer to help him if he'll come to Mars...

Meeting Sheridan in a Martian bar, Garibaldi drugs the captain and hands him over to Earthgov authorities. With Sheridan captured, Edgars reveals his hidden agenda. Although his corporation has been developing a cure for a lethal virus which targets telepaths, they also developed the virus in the first place (with covert assistance from the Shadows). Edgars feels the telepaths are attempting to take over, and intends to control or destroy them.

Hearing this, Garibaldi activates a beacon hidden in a fake tooth, and contacts Bester. When the Shadows and their Psi-Corps allies captured Garibaldi, they intended to reprogram him so he'd take control of Babylon 5 following Sheridan's death, but Bester turned the project to his own purposes.

The security chief's recent actions were the result of an implanted personality designed to emphasise his paranoia and hatred of telepaths, so Edgars would recruit him. Now Bester knows Edgars' aims, he arranges to have the businessman and his project destroyed, while restoring Garibaldi's original personality.

Garibaldi rushes back to Edgars' home to find the industrialist dead, the virus gone and Lise missing. He tries to contact Babylon 5, but an enraged Ivanova has ordered him shot on sight, while President Clark orders a planetary holiday to celebrate Sheridan's capture...
To be continued...

D18 Intersections In Real Time

(418: 16 June 1997)
Written by: J Michael Straczynski
Directed by: John LaFia
Guest cast: Interrogator (Bruce Gray); Drazi (Wayne Alexander); William (Raye Birk)

Alone in his cell, Sheridan is tormented by memories as an interrogator enters and begins his work, having first asked whether the captain suffers from any condition which might threaten his survival...

The interrogator encourages Sheridan to confess that he was influenced by alien powers, and brings in a Drazi who confesses he helped turn Sheridan against Earth. Sheridan persuades him to withdraw the confession, and the Drazi is taken away for execution. Sheridan is left listening to a subliminal recording, and the interrogator offers him his freedom, for as long as it lasts, if he co-operates. When Sheridan refuses, the interrogator offers him a final chance – co-operate now, or they'll fake a posthumous confession. When he refuses, Sheridan is led away for execution... To a room where he meets the Drazi and the interrogator, who asks if he has any life-threatening ailments. The nightmare begins again...
To be continued...

Coming soon:
Between The Darkness And The Light (419: 6 October 1997); **End Game** (420: 13 October 1997); **Rising Star** (421: 20 October 1997); **The Deconstruction Of Falling Stars** (501: 27 October 1997); **In The Beginning** (4 January 1998); **Thirdspace** (June 1998); **Sleeping In Light** (422: 15 June 1998)

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

D26 A Call To Arms

(524: 9 June 1997)
Written by: Ira Steven Behr and Robert Hewitt Wolfe
Directed by: Allan Kroeker

SF FOR THE FALL

Ed Gross provides a sneak preview of two SF series hitting US screens this Autumn...

The Visitor

"Strange Visitor from another planet who came to Earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men..."

That might be a bit of an exaggeration, but a guy in tights and a flowing red cape is probably the only genre cliché that the pilot for *The Visitor* is missing. As they proved in the flick hit *ID4*, film-makers Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich have an uncanny ability to create pastiches of past successes by mixing them in such as way as to make the ingredients palatable for modern audiences, rather than offering completely original visions. Unlike that alien invasion film, however, *The Visitor* is more mish-mash than *homage*.

Northern Exposure's John Corbett is cast as an Air Force pilot who disappears mysteriously in 1947, only to reappear on Earth 50 years later, unaged and piloting a spacecraft that is obviously one of the alien battle shuttles featured in *ID4*. Somehow enhanced by becoming one with the universe ("Use the Force, Luke"), he has returned to guide mankind through what is destined to be a difficult period (shades of Gary Seven from the original *Star Trek* episode "Assignment: Earth"). As Corbett sets out on his destiny, the government (naturally) wants him captured and dissected and it puts him on the run.

In these sequences, the show attempts to take on the government conspiracy angle of *The X-Files* (which no other series has been able to successfully emulate), played out between agents of the FBI and the military, the former attempting to gather more info, with the latter being predictably tight-lipped.

In the first episode, Corbett is aided by a divorcee who sees something of her husband in this guy (echoes of *Starman*) and her son, a rebellious, self-perceived loser who might be modelled on the character of John Connor in *Terminator II*. It culminates in a death and resurrection scene lifted directly from Spielberg's *ET*

***Sleepwalkers'* cast includes *Nowhere Man* Bruce Greenwood, and Jet Girl Naomi Watts.**

Marriage and moving house are the most stressful things known to man. Worf's facing both!

Guest cast: Gul Dukat (Marc Alaimo); Nog (Aron Eisenberg); Tora Ziyal (Melanie Smith); Rom (Max Grodénchik); Leeta (Chase Masterson); General Martok (JG Hertzler); Damar (Casey Biggs); Garak (Andrew J Robinson); Weyoun (Jeffrey Coombs); Morn (Mark Allan Shephard); Injured Officer (Robert Hewitt Wolfe)

Wedding bells sound aboard the station as Rom and Leeta prepare for their marriage, and Dax is delighted by Worf's decision to accept her proposal. Unfortunately, the continued influx of Dominion troops to Cardassian space threatens their future. As the Romulans sign a non-aggression pact with the Dominion, Sisko decides to stem the invasion by saturating the wormhole with mines...

While the others evacuate, Odo remains on DS9 – aka Terok Nor.

A pre-emptive strike by Federation forces on Dominion shipyards in Cardassian space proves successful, but undermines the attempts to defend the spacestation from a Jem Hadar attack. The Federation are forced to evacuate, thus returning the station to Cardassian control. Odo, Kira, Quark and Rom remain behind, with Jake choosing to stay on as a war correspondent. Sisko also leaves his baseball in the commander's office, as a signal to Dukat that he'll be back – at the head of a massive Starfleet-Klingon task force...

***Northern Exposure's* John Corbett stars as *The Visitor*.**

Sleepwalkers

The exploration of our dreamworld has been fodder for SF writers for some time (though the only film that springs immediately to mind is *Dreamscape*), but *Sleepwalkers* seems like it has the best potential of them all to succeed on the small screen.

Bruce Greenwood, last seen in the brilliantly conceived but confusingly executed *Nowhere Man*, portrays Dr Nathan Bradford, the head of a literal dream team that uses technology he developed to enable him to enter the dream world of his comatose wife, thus enabling their relationship to flourish despite the slight handicap of her no longer being conscious. The team, which includes *ER*'s Abraham Benrubi, essentially uses this technology to enter the subconscious minds of people in an attempt to help them. Despite the way it sounds on a superficial level, don't confuse the premise with such lightness as *Touched By An Angel*, because these visitations are considerably darker. The pilot story – involving a man who's nightmares are taking a physical toll on him, and whose visions start appearing while he's awake – delves into memories from the womb, their gradual revelation years later and the impact they have on his current life.

The script comes from a rather unlikely collaboration between executive producers David Goyer *(The Crow: City Of Angels)* and Stephen Kronish (TV's *Wiseguy* and *The Commish*), but sets things up nicely for the series to follow, giving the audience a taste of the surreal without weirding the show out to a switch-off degree. David Nutter, probably best known for his directorial efforts on *The X-Files* and *Millennium*, plays things lower-key than you'd expect, but he does manage to balance the human drama with the show's tech, creating an effective atmosphere in the dreamworlds portrayed. By making these realities only slightly askew from *the* reality, he manages to intensify their impact.

In future episodes, the team reportedly enter the mind of a dying serial killer in the belief that one of his victims is still alive somewhere; become involved with a woman who receives a kidney transplant and starts dreaming the dreams of the organ donor; struggles with a Stephen King-like writer haunted by his own creations; explores the varied mental landscapes and participants created in the mind of someone suffering from multiple personalities; and must rescue Nathan from the mind of a terminally ill patient who dies while he's within her. As such, *Sleepwalkers* so inds like the kind of show that will grow cons derably more interesting as it evolves, and take more risks than the pilot might indicate.

before Corbett hits the road, like every other fugitive since Dr Richard Kimble.

Making things worse is a heapin' helpin' of cornball feel-good philosophy ("If you believe with your heart, then anything can happen") that even the over-the-head bloodletting/bludgeoning of the original *Star Trek* (which I happen to be a fan of, incidentally) wouldn't touch with a ten-foot phaser. The omens for this one don't look good

Third Rock From The Sun

B21 Sensitive Dick

(221: 27 April 1987)

The Solomons attempt to turn over a new leaf, with Dick making a determined effort not to over-do things, Harry falling for Mrs Dubcek's beautiful daughter, and Tommy taking Sally and Officer Don for a ride...

D22 Will Work For Dick

(223: 4 May 1997)

Dick finds himself in two minds after Harry proves inadequate to the task in hand – and Nina discovers the dark side of his personality...

D23 Fifteen Minutes Of Dick

(222: 11 May 1997)

Sally takes centre-stage, but soon lets fame go to her head. With Dick and Tommy alienated, it's left to Harry to worship her as she deserves...

D24 Dick And The Single Girl

(224: 11 May 1997)

An encounter with an alluring woman leaves Dick at the mercy of his all-too human body, and only Mary can save him...

D25 A Nightmare On Dick Street

(225/226: 18 May 1997 – one-hour special)

The Solomons start dreaming – and they don't like the experience. Faced with this unexpected, 3D threat to their sanity, they decide to return home, but a development in Dick's relationship with Mary persuades him to stay. Too late, he discovers the terrible truth about what humans do at night, and races to tell his family they needn't leave Earth for home...

The Outer Limits

C16 The Revelations Of 'Becka Paulson

(6 June 1997)
Written by: Brad Wright
Based on a short story by: Steven King
Directed by: Steven Weber
Cast: Catherine O'Hara, John Diehl, Bill Dow, Marilyn Norry, Steven Weber, Barry Mickelson, Jon Charidiet, Preston Maybank, Russell E Porter, Carla White, Jo-Ann MacDonald, David Glyn-Jones

An unattractive housewife finds an escape from her boring life by developing a strange relationship with a photograph.

D17 Bodies Of Evidence

(20 June 1997)
Teleplay by: Chris Dickie
Story by: Chris Dickie and Ryland Kelley
Directed by: Melvin Van Peebles
Cast: Mario Van Peebles, Guylaine St Onge, Ken Camroux, Berry W Levy, Roman Podhora, Gerard Plunkett, Jennifer Beals, David Lloyd Austin, Tatiana Chekhova, David Neale, Linden Banks, Patrick Kealing, Alexander Pollock, Kathryn Anderson, Zinaid Memisevic.

The deaths of a spacestation crew leave their commander accused of mass murder, until it's discovered the deceased all committed suicide. But what could dupe an entire crew into such a suicidal state?

D18 Feasibility Study

Written by: Joseph Stefano
Directed by: Ken Girotti
Cast: Laura Harris, Chilton Crane, David McCallum, Malcolm Stewart

In a re-make of a classic episode from the original series, a suburban community put aside their marital problems and neighbourly squabbles after realising they're actually prisoners of an alien race exploring the possibility of enslaving mankind...

Hercules

C17 Les Contemptibles

(7 April 1997)
Cast: Robert (Kevin Sorbo); Jean-Pierre (Michael Hurst); Lady Marie de Valle (Danielle Cormack); Francois (Robert

Hercules travels from Atlantis to 18th century France in this latest batch of legendary journeys.

PRODUCTION HELL

As ever, we issue our regular monthly warning that there may be changes in line-up and creative personnel before the following films even go into pre-production...

For more information, please check the SFX Website at http://www.futurenet.co.uk

Key: Dir – Director; Scr – Script writer; ExPrd – Exec Producer; Prd – Producer; St – Starring.

BEOWULF (Kushner-Locke/Capitol) Graham *(Omen III, Alien Nation)* Baker has signed up to direct Christopher *(Greystoke, Highlander)* Lambert in what Capitol are touting as a $20 million budgeted battle between a dark warrior and a creature of all-consuming evil. The producer is Lawrence *(True Lies)* Kasanoff, and shooting should begin in Europe in late September. No problems on author royalties with this one since he/she/they are all very much dead!

DARK IS RISING Jim Henson Pictures have optioned Susan Cooper's 1973 fantasy novel, which has been a popular read in American elementary schools for years (and our editor absolutely adores). The $20m movie will tell the story of Will Stanton, an 11 year old who discovers he's the last of the Old Ones, an immortal fellowship dedicated to protecting the world (junior *Highlander*, anyone?) and who has to take a journey to collect six talismans that will test his courage to the limits. Andrew Klavan is writing the script and Duncan *(Four Weddings)* Kenworthy is on hand to take the producing honours.

DEEP IMPACT ExPrd Steven Spielberg, Joan Bradshaw. Prd David Brown, Richard Zanuck. Dir Mimi Leder. Scr Bruce Joel Rubin *(Ghost)*, Michael Tolkin. St Tea Leoni, Elijah Wood, Robert Duvall, Morgan Freeman, Vanessa Redgrave. The latest signatory to the leader of the forthcoming asteroid-movie craze *(Armageddon* starts shooting later in the year) is Mary *(Murder One, Private Parts)* McCormack, who will play a female astronaut, part of a Soviet-American team charged with intercepting an asteroid before it collides with Earth.

Meanwhile, Dougray Scott will be playing Tea Leoni's love interest. The film began shooting in LA on 16 June.

Continued overleaf...

PRODUCTION HELL

EATERS OF THE DEAD (Disney) ExPrd John McTiernan. Prd Ned Dowd, Michael Crichton. Dir John McTiernan. Scr Warren Lewis, William Wisher, from the novel by Michael Crichton. St Antonio Banderas. Crichton's 1976 novel is set in 922AD and is about an Arab courtier who goes with a group of Vikings to the barbaric North where he is appalled by their pillaging, barbarism and uncleanliness – although he ends up trying to save them from a fatal terror that is eating their flesh. Joining Banderas will be Diane (Heat) Venora and Omar (Dr Zhivago) Sharif.

GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY (Fox) Jan de Bont has dropped out of his supposed next movie, the thriller *Zero Hour*, and is turning his full attention to this cowboys 'n' aliens flick.

I AM LEGEND (Warner Bros) Ridley Scott has officially signed on to this adaptation of Richard Matheson's twice-filmed novel and so (possibly) has Arnold Schwarzenegger. Filming could begin late this year.

I DREAM OF JEANNIE Who can forget Larry Hagman as the much put-upon astronaut Tony Nelson and Barbara Eden as Jeannie in this '60s sitcom? Not Columbia, who have picked up the rights from its creator Sidney Sheldon (yes, that one). Sheldon and Sid Ganis will produce the big-screen version.

INSTINCT Disney are in negotiations to option Ron Casden's forthcoming novel about insects who have developed a language and threaten to take over the world.

THE INVADERS Warner Bros. have put in a bid to Carolco for the rights to the '60s ABC TV show. The old Quinn Martin production starred Roy Thinnes as an architect who discovered that aliens disguised as humans were readying the Earth for a full-scale invasion.

THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS (Castle Rock) Fraser (son of Charlton) Heston is to direct an updated adaptation by Mick Davis of Bram Stoker's 94-year-old, twice-filmed novel. The modern-day storyline involves an architect who disappears in the '70s. Decades later, his daughter is shocked to receive an e-mail from her "dead" father requesting she urgently travel to Egypt. With only ten days before the millennium, she teams up with a young archaeologist to seek out his discovery. Heston and Alex Butler, both currently working on nuclear thriller *Ground Zero*, will produce, with a targeted start date in October.

LUKE CAGE Dir John Singleton. ExPrd Bradford Smith. Prd Ed Pressman, Singleton. Based on the Marvel character, Luke Cage is the former Power Man, a black superhero for hire. JD Zeik is having a crack at the script; the previous version by Ron Friedman is said to have cast Cage as a sort of Count of Monte Cristo.

Busty maidens, male-bonding, and sudden transfers of setting? All in a day's work...

REVIEW

Deep Space Nine

"Call To Arms"

***Deep Space Nine* has long proven itself to be a show in a constant state of flux, where the events of one episode give off reverberations that are inevitably felt somewhere down the line. In the case of the fifth season, though, much of the year itself represented a gradual shift in tone and direction, culminating in "Call To Arms."**

Picking up on threads laid down particularly strongly in the episodes "Ties of Blood And Water" and the two-parter "In Purgatory's Shadow" and "By Inferno's Light," the episode commences with the Dominion's build-up of a military presence in the Alpha Quadrant and concludes with an extremely strong space battle between the Dukat led fleet and Deep Space Nine, with Starfleet ultimately abandoning the station in the wake of Bajor signing a non-aggression pact with the Dominion.

While the book-ends of the episode work remarkably well, it's the human core that makes this episode so powerful. Director Allan Kroeker successfully manages to cast the shadow of war over virtually every scene, gradually building a sense of the approaching danger, yet at the same time never allowing his cast of characters to get mired in dread and hopelessness. He's helped in no small way by Ira Steven Behr and Robert Hewitt Wolfe's script, which punctuates the action with scene after scene of pure character, among them Rom and Leeta getting married and then separated by events; Martok's heroic determination to fight off the Dominion so that Dax can use the Defiant to mine the wormhole and stop further Dominion incursions; and Sisko's speech to the troops, who he refers to as his family.

Then there are sequences that are a pure joy to watch, such as the diplomatic ping-ponging between Sisko and Weyoun, in which they talk of peace between their peoples, yet their every word and expression belies the fact that war has now become inevitable. Marc Alaimo also gets the opportunity to convey Gul Dukat's sheer joy at returning to his old office on Deep Space Nine in seeming victory, though the wind is taken out of his sails by the discovery of Sisko's baseball on the desk – signifying the captain's obvious intent to return.

Also particularly satisfying about this episode is that it isn't a cliffhanger in the traditional sense, such as *TNG's* "Best Of Both Worlds," part one of which ended with the Enterprise about to fire on the Borg cube and the audience having to wait an entire Summer to see the results. In the case of "Call To Arms," the Cardassian-Dominion Alliance have taken the station, with Sisko's Defiant and Martok and Worf's Bird Of Prey joining the ranks of the largest Starfleet/Klingon armada we've ever seen. As a result, instead of feeling as though we were reading a book with missing pages, we've merely finished one chapter and have to wait until the Fall to begin the next. Looking forward to it.

Edward Gross

General Martok takes an increasingly important role.

Trebor); Gerrard (Patrick Wilson); Falafel (Paul Norell)

A pair of boisterous 18th-century highwaymen become embroiled in the exploits of the Chartreuse Fox as he battles for the revolutionary cause – and their resemblance to Herc and Iolaus is purely coincidental.

Disclaimer: *The French accents depicted in this motion picture are entirely fictitious. Any similarity to actual accents, living or dead, is coincidental. Vive la revolution!*

C18 Reign Of Terror

(714 April 1997)

Cast: King Augeus (Grant Bridger); Aphrodite (Alexandra Tydings); Salmoneus (Robert Trevor). Palamedes (Bruce Phillips)

Mad King Augeus decides it's time he gained promotion, and appoints himself King Of The Gods. The chaos he causes among gods and mortals is considerable enough, but then Hera decides to add to the fun by granting him powers appropriate to his new station...

Disclaimer: *The sheep's political and cultural independence was restored after the making of this motion picture.*

C19 The End Of The Beginning

(21 April 1997)

Cast: Serena (Kara Zedikar); Ares (Kevin Smith); Strife (Joel Tobeck);

Qualius (Ian Watkin); Autolycus (Bruce Campbell)

Autolycus steals a gem-stone which gives him the power to travel back in time, and finds he's got an unexpected companion on his first journey... A development which enables Hercules to enjoy an out-of-order, non-chronological first meeting with Serena...

Disclaimer: *Neither the time-space continuum nor any previous storylines were harmed during the production of this motion picture.*

C20 War Bride

(28 April 1997)
Directed by: Kevin Sorbo
Cast: Princess Melissa (Lisa Chappell); Alexa (Josephine Davison); Gordius (Ross McKellar); Acteon (Mark Rafferty); Hargus (Marcel Kalma)

Marriage looms for a spoilt princess, who starts to sulk when confronted by the massively gross bulk of her future husband. But her tantrums are as nothing compared to the disruption caused by her kidnapping...

Disclaimer: *No leather-clad, pointy-breasted, bouffant-wearing, pillow-smothering, two-faced sisters were harmed during the production of this motion picture.*

C21 A Rock And A Hard Place

(5 May 1997)
Directed by: Kevin Sorbo
Cast: Cassus (Lindsay Ginter); Perius (Tony Ward); Nico (Caleb Ross); Lyna (Lee-Jane Foreman); Geryon (Sterling Cathman)

A dying criminal takes refuge in an abandoned mine when pursued by a vengeful mob – can Hercules mediate a settlement and keep the tunnel walls from collapsing?

Disclaimer: *No convicts were squashed like a bug during the making of this motion picture.*

C22 Atlantis

Cast: Cassandra (Claudia Black); Pantnius (James Beaumont); Skirner (William Davis); Demetrius (Ross Harper)

Herc visits Atlantis, a magical world of advanced technology which the prophetess Cassandra insists is doomed. But, of course, no-one listens...

Warning: *Crystal waves were used during the production of this motion picture. Pregnant women should leave the room indefinitely.*

Poltergeist: The Legacy

A15 Dark Priest

(9 August 1996)
Written by: Grant Rosenberg
Directed by: Brad Turner

A thief uses a party at the Legacy house as cover to steal a medallion connected to an evil sorcerer, and Nick encounters a magician whose gruesome tricks lead him to believe there may be a connection between the two...

Trek Rumour Mill

Deep Space Nine: Seven Seasons After All?

DS9's chances of a seventh season are looking unexpectedly good as the cast begin filming an extended arc to open the sixth season. Rene Auberjonois told an Australian convention audience in early July that Paramount were looking into the possibility of doing a seventh season, and that after discussions with the cast Rick Berman had revealed: "Four people had agreed to do the seventh season," including Auberjonois himself, Nana Visitor and Alexander Siddig.

Other members of the cast are less likely to stick around, although Colm Meaney may stay as long as he can keep his burgeoning film career ticking over. As far as films were concerned, Auberjonois suspected that *DS9*'s Starfleet characters might join the *Next Generation* crew on the big screen after the series' end, but that a full-fledged *Deep Space Nine* film remained unlikely.

A decision on the show's future is expected before the end of the year, so the producers can decide whether to wrap up the on-going storyline dominating season six. As the season ends (see boxout, left) the station is once again Terok Nor, a Cardassian station controlled by Gul Dukat. With Dominion help, Odo, Kira and the Ferengi have remained behind as the Federation evacuated, while Jake has taken up a posting as a war correspondent – a dangerous position given that his father has mined the wormhole to prevent the arrival of further Jem Hadar reinforcements...

Don't quote us... *Some really wild rumours about season six*

"A Time To Stand" (also rumoured "Heart Of Darkness") Written by Ira Steven Behr and Hans Beimler

"Rocks And Shoals," written by Ronald D Moore. Garak turns his attentions to Rom, the Federation spy aboard Terok Nor. Alternatively, episode two is also reported to be **"Point Of No Return,"** written by Ronald D Moore. The Defiant returns to Earth following the failure of Starfleet's attempts to recapture Deep Space Nine, in preparation for an imminent Dominion attack – but are ambushed *en route*. The Dominion have other plans for Sisko's crew.

"All Shapes And Sizes," written by Ira Steven Behr. Sisko regains control of the Defiant... But are his crew as they seem? This episode is also rumoured to be written by David Weddle and Bradley Thompson.

"For The Lobes," written by Rene Echevarria. On Terok Nor, the Dominion prepare to execute a Federation spy – Rom. Only Quark, Nog and Morn can save him from a grisly demise...

And later... The recapture of the station, at great cost... A return to the Mirror Universe, scripted by the acclaimed author of "The Visitor."

Star Trek Voyaging On

Don't quote us.... *Some really wild rumours about season four.*

"Scorpion, Part II" The destruction of a Borg cube which sacrifices itself to save Voyager leaves the ship with an extra passenger... Seven of Nine, a woman who's lived most of her life as a Borg. As she adjusts to humanity, the Voyager takes the battle against Species 8472 into their own space...

"Paradigms" The relationship between B'Elenna Torres and Tom Paris takes centre stage.

"The Gift" Kes starts to resonate on a different quantum frequency, beginning – prematurely – her transformation to another plane of existence which strikes Ocampa on their death. To save the ship, she's forced to leave in a shuttle... and meet her fate alone...

"Nemesis" Stranded on an alien planet, Chakotay becomes the only member of the crew to get caught up in a vicious alien war...

"Day Of Honor" Problems force Voyager to jettison her warp core, leaving the ship without power. As Torres and Chakotay attempt to pursue the lost core, they are forced to abandon their shuttle, and admit how they feel for one another while in spacesuits.

PRODUCTION HELL

MATRIX (Warner) Prd Joel Silver. Scr Larry & Andy Wachowski. St Keanu Reeves. If he signs, Reeves will play a man whose normal life is haunted by flashbacks which show him being hooked up to computers in a 21st century lab, making him suspect that he's part of an enslaved society. The Wachowski brothers (who did lesbian mob-chick flick *Bound*) are to direct, with a start set for some time this Autumn.

MIGHTY JOE YOUNG (MJ4/Walt Disney) ExPrd Wolfgang Petersen, Mark Lisson, Gary Stutman, Gail Katz. Prd Ted Hartley, Tom Jacobson. Dir Ron Underwood. Scr Lawrence Konner, Mark Rosenthal. St Bill Paxton, David Paymer, Regina King, Charlene Theron, Noveen Andrews. 30 days into their 75-day schedule, director of photography Don Peterman was rushed to hospital with a broken leg and head injuries, after a camera crane snapped and he was hit by a camera, a camera platform and, um, a cameraman (Ray de la Motte) who received minor neck, chest and back injuries. Filming was halted for two days.

THE POSTMAN (Warner Bros) Prd Kevin Costner, Jim Wilson, Steve Tisch. Dir Kevin Costner. Scr Eric Roth, Brian Helgeland. St Kevin Costner, Will Patton, Olivia Williams, Larenz Tate, James Russo. Crooner Tom Petty has just signed up to play the tired mayor of a post-apocalyptic community.

REVENANT Dir Richard Elfman. Scr Matthew Bright. Top Glaswegian comedian Craig Ferguson has joined the cast of the slick modern-day vampire thriller which already boasts Rod Steiger, Casper Van Diem, Udo Kier and Natasha Gregson Wagner. Ferguson will be playing the bloodsucking owner of an elegant gallery.

ROGER RABBIT II (Walt Disney) After rejecting many ideas, the sequel to the 1988 $400m grossing, four Academy Awards-winning hit is likely to be a huge '30s-style musical about how Roger and Jessica Rabbit got together. Alan *(The Little Mermaid)* Menken is said to be completing a score for the movie, although no-one will confirm a release schedule.

THE SECOND ARRIVAL (Live Entertainment) Live are already shooting a sequel to David Twohy's straight-to-vide ETs-on-Earth flick *The Arrival* (**SFX27**, B), starring Charlie Sheen. Kevin *(Witchboard)* Tenney is directing a script by Mark David Perry.

SMALL SOLDIERS (DreamWorks) Joe Dante, who hasn't made a feature film since the under-rated *Matinee*, is set to direct this live-action/CGI adventure about a young boy and his army of toy soldiers which come to life.

SPACE CADETS Another Robert A Heinlein novel lands in the Hollywood in-tray. Steven E *(Judge Dredd)* De Souza is scripting.

Continued overleaf...

Working for Legacy is a good way to keep yourself hale and hearty.

A16 Revelations
(16 August 1996)
Written by: Frank Abatemarco
Directed by: Allan Kroeker

Investigating an incident at her old school, Rachel discovers a coven gathering their power in preparation for the Solstice...

A17 The Bones Of St Anthony
(23 August 1996)
Written by: Robert Masello
Directed by: Helen Shaver

The strange death of a geneticist prompts an investigation which leads The Legacy to their old enemy, Victor Arkadi.

A18 Inheritance
(30 August 1996)
Written by: Bill Bleich
Directed by: Brad Turner

Rachel visits her aunt's decaying Southern mansion following the old woman's death, arousing Kat's concern over her fascination for the building. As Aunt Rebecca attempts to steal Rachel's soul, Nick attempts to find the secret of the ghost's power...

A19 The Signalman
(6 September 1996)
Written by: George Geiger
Directed by: Brenton Spencer
Cast: Dr Prager (Kevin Kilner)

Alex contacts an old friend, and devout sceptic David Prager, only to find him haunted by premonitions of disaster in a railway tunnel through which the army plan to ship nerve gas...

A20 The Reckoning
(13 September 1996)
Written by: Garner Simmons
Directed by: Michael Robinson
Cast: Christina (Zelda Rubenstein)

Derek and Kat are contacted by Christina, an enigmatic spirit who attempts to warn them of imminent danger.

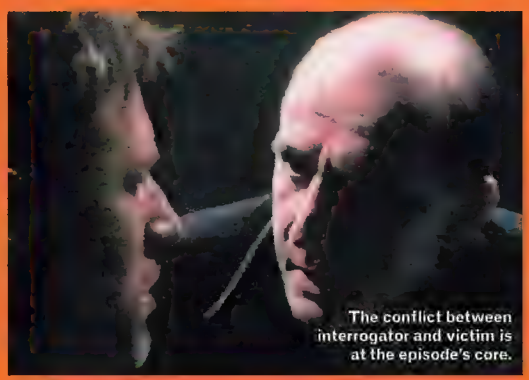
A21 Traitor Among Us
(20 September 1996)
Written by: Bill Froelich
Directed by: Brenton Spencer

Representatives of three other Legacy houses journey to San Francisco and charge Derek with treason...

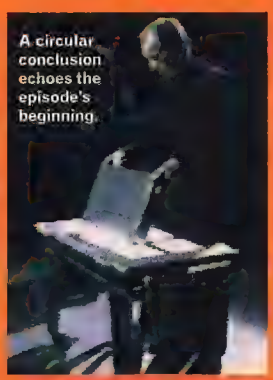
BABYLON 5 REVIEW

"INTERSECTIONS IN REAL TIME"

The effective final episode of *B5's* fourth season – for US viewers at least, if not for us – throws out most of the series' standard elements. It isn't, in fact, set in a single room, but it comes close, and there are no scenes on Babylon 5 itself, no obvious special effects sequences, and no appearances by the bulk of the regular cast. Instead, Sheridan faces a sole interrogator in a single room. Even the start-of-episode recap is presented as the captain's tormented memories.



The conflict between interrogator and victim is at the episode's core.



A circular conclusion echoes the episode's beginning.

With its unusual structure, the comparisons to *The Prisoner's* two-handed interrogation episode, "Once Upon A Time," not to mention *TNG's* "Chain Of Command," are inevitable. But in many ways, the closest echo is to an episode we never got to see – the back plot to *Blake's 7*, where Blake was interrogated, broken, brainwashed into confessing and sent out into the community to live as an example of a truly repentant Federation citizen. Even the echoes of those events were enough to make *Blake's 7's* opening instalment a hard-hitting piece head-and-shoulders above most of the series. Here, we get to see such scenes, although the outcome is rather different...

There are problems with the format. This is effectively a radio play, and while director John LaFia does a valiant job, with unusual camera angles and stark lighting, there's little to keep your eyes on the screen. Personally, that's the sort of drama I like, but it does mean you're in danger of missing a couple of crucial visuals. Ironically for such a wordy piece, the most important moments are purely visual, unmentioned and their significance, merely implied.

On the acting side, Bruce Boxleitner is unusually subdued, playing Sheridan as someone who's been beaten, starved and mistreated, but the real honours must go to interrogator Bruce Gray, who previously played Mentor, an enigmatic computer with a penchant for mimicking the central character's father (sound familiar?) in Straczynski's episodes of *Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future*. It's Gray's performance which finally sells the episode alight (the only other major role being the Drazi played by Wayne Alexander so excellent as Sebastian in "Comes The Inquisitor") as the emphasis shifts towards his apparent concern that Sheridan might hold out against co-operation for so long that *his* superiors might execute him. It's a compelling, edge-of-the-seat depiction of the Helsinki syndrome. Whether Sheridan's convinced by the interrogator's apparent anxieties or not, Gray's compelling enough to win the audience's sympathy.

You can start expecting too much of *Babylon 5*. At first, the mind games of "Intersections In Real Time" seem almost disappointing. But by the end, it's becomes something which ranks among the series' highest achievements, and makes *TNG's* "Chain Of Command" seem as hard-hitting as an old *Buck Rogers*.

Anthony Brown

Over the course of "Intersections..." Sheridan's condition steadily worsens – but hope remains...

PRODUCTION HELL

SPHERE (Warner Bros) Prd Barry Levinson, Michael Crichton, Andrew Wald. Dir Barry Levinson. St Dustin Hoffman, Sharon Stone, Samuel L Jackson, Liev Schreiber. After the production shut down in October so that Warners could tighten costs (from $95m to $80m), Levinson's adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel has actually come in under budget – some say as low as $73m. Principal photography wrapped at the end of June. Warners have Friday 12 December pencilled in for a US release date.

STAR TREK A documentary entitled Trekkies has been shot by Roger Nygard for Neo Motion Pictures. It looks at the mania surrounding *Trek* and includes a visit to the 31-foot Enterprise replica in Vulcan, Ohio, a chat with a bloke who changed his name to James T Kirk, and a trip to Riverside, Iowa, where Kirk will be born. Dear-oh-dear.

STAR WARS Despite an original announcement that they had no intention of releasing the Special Edition movies on video (see Strange Tales, starting on page 5), Fox Home Entertainment will be releasing the trilogy in August in the USA, but it will only be available for 97 days.

VALIANT Jim Henson Pictures have picked up the rights to a story by Jay Dubin and Paul Zaloom, writers of the US Saturday morning kids' science show *Beakman's World*. The movie involves an underground society of nuclear-powered cars that came to life during nuclear tests in Nevada in the '50s/'60s. The cars are being threatened and call in some help from a tomboy and the leader of a motorcycle gang. As well as screenplay chores, Dubin will direct and Zaloom produce.

THE X-FILES !!SPOILER WARNING!! Despite security tighter than a duck's back passage, including having scripts printed on coloured paper so they can't be photocopied, and giving characters dummy names (Martin Landau has joined the cast as Mr Farber for instance), the *National Enquirer* has somehow got hold of a script for next year's movie, so **SKIP OVER THIS IF YOU DON'T WANT DETAILS...** The film, shot in LA (not Vancouver, as the *Enquirer* had it), begins in northern Texas around 35,000 BC where two primitive hunters kill a strange lizard-like creature in an ice cave. But the wounded beast's blood seems to have a life of its own and creeps into one of the savage's mouths and eyes. Cut to the present day: on the same spot, a group of boys find a human skull. A week later, Mulder is in Dallas when his car is blown up; he emerges shaken but okay, only to learn from a friend of his dad's that certain government officials are in league with aliens to cover up a plot to destroy mankind with a lethal virus spread by infected bees. Scully and Mulder get to kiss, only to have the tender moment fall apart. Scully is stung and Mulder is shot. Mulder escapes from the hospital to rescue his partner, now in the hands of the conspiracists...

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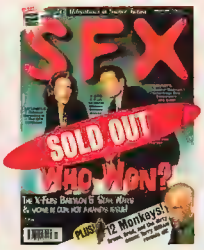

SFX23 *Star Wars: The Special Edition* review, behind the scenes of *The Borrowers*, interviews with *Dark Skies'* lead stars... Code: **SFXB023**

SFX24 *Star Wars: Special Edition* prints, Arthur C Clarke, *DS9*'s Terry Farrell and *Lexx*. Code: **SFXB024**

SFX25 Behind the scenes of *Discworld*, *Voyager*'s Kate Mulgrew, *B5*'s Jeff Conaway and more! Code: **SFXB025**

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As a bloated, swelling sun destroys humanity with its carcinogenic rays, there remains only one hope – the **SFX** Baseball Cap. Sporting a broad brim and a glowing green logo, it will enable you to enjoy forays in bright areas without having to risk injury to your peelers. It might even make you look cool (although we recommend carrying the **SFX** Binder for the full effect). Code: **SFXCAP**

SFX26
Patrick Macnee talks *Avengers*, *B5*'s Centauri speak, *X-Files* past, present and future, *Space Truckers'* director Stuart Gordon talks SF!
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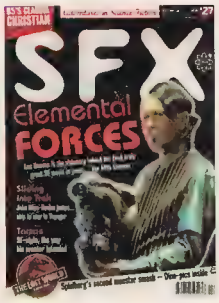

SFX27
Luc Besson on *The Fifth Element*, plus interviews with ex-*Sliders* John Rhys-Davies, *B5*'s Claudia Christian and *Glass* author Stephen Palmer.
Code: **SFXB027**

SFX28
Men In Black exposé, *Space Island One* effects, a set visit to *The Uninvited*, *Evangelion*, a chat with sfx guy Terry English, and loads more!
Code: **SFXB028**

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Everything you need to know about the Discworld books and cartoon, plus a massive double-sided Josh Kirby/Paul Kidby poster!
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FAMOUS SOLDIERS FROM THE FIELD TELL SFX WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT THE BURNING ISSUES OF THE DAY.

Greg Proops
Chief Space Cadet

Name: Greg Proops.
In reality: Stand-up comic.
In science fiction: High Commander of Channel 4's *Space Cadets*.
Current activities: Regular panelist on *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*

Do you actually like science fiction? Yes, I do. I'm a big fan.

What's the last SF film you saw? I've seen six in the last week, but the last one was *Barbarella,* because it was on last night!

Are you in favour of capital punishment? No.

Did you vote? I did, but in the American elections!

Who should have become Tory leader? Well, it's William Hague, but he's going to be leading a party in exile for the next five years, so I suppose they need someone who can get people back on their side – which is going to be difficult to do!

Do you have a motto? Never let anyone tell you no.

Which was the best Bond film? I think *From Russia With Love,* though a lot of people would say *Goldfinger. Goldfinger's* outstanding, I just prefer *From Russia With Love.*

Does Chris Evans deserve a raise or a firing squad? Those are the only two choices I get, heh? Well, he's very good at what he does, so I suppose most people would say he deserves a ra se.

Favourite Spice Girl? Posh Spice.

Blur or Oasis? I think I like Oasis better. I've never bought a Blur record, and I have two Oasis albums.

What would you do if you won the lottery? Go on holiday, probably.

Which is your favourite film? I don't know, *The Wizard Of Oz, Casablanca.* My favourite sci-fi film is probably *2001.*

Should Rick have got on the plane with Ilsa at the end of Casablanca? No, of course not. There's no plot if they do that. Bogey's a stand-up guy, and stand-up guys do what's right.

Truly, Madly, Deeply – tripe or triumph? I couldn't watch it. I hate wife-dying plots. I'm very happily married and I can't stand that sort of thing.

Should starship captains be bald? They should be, yes.

Who's the best starship Captain? Well, you know, I've just met William Shatner and I don't want him to read that I didn't say him, so it's got to be Kirk. I happen to like Picard quite a bit. Captain Janeway isn't my thing.

Who was the best Doctor? Out of all the ships, you mean? Well, the hottest doctor was Dr Crusher. She's one of the sexiest women ever on TV.

How do Daleks get upstairs? With great difficulty.

How many times did you take your driving test? Just once. I passed it.

Biro or fountain pen? A Mont Blanc fountain pen.

Favourite fruit? I think bananas.

Are you a cat or dog person? Cat.

Is Elvis dead? No. He's working in a storage depot in Jefferson, Alabama.

Do you know where he lives? I can't disclose that.

Star sign? Libra

Favourite colour? Navy blue, or black.

Would you wear fur? If I had any. I reckon the fur thing has got out of hand.

Who'd play you in a bio-pic? Somebody a lot better-looking than me, and younger.

Shoe size? 10 and a half, American.

Which spaceship would you like to own? The Millennium Falcon.

Do aliens exist? In our minds, yes.

Is the Truth Out There? Yes, but you won't find it on TV.

Craig Stennett

WIN! WIN! WIN!

Vader's bonce, Star Wars games plus MIB Books

Heh, heh! The big cheese may have put an innuendo ban on the reviews section, but this is the compos page, so I should be able to slip a few dubious ones past him if I'm quick... Well, we all have to get our kicks somehow, and, hey, do we have a top competition prize this month...

The prize? Darth Vader's helmet (£80 from Space Odyssey ☎ (0161) 839 4777, folks; see review on page 106). Not the real one obviously, but a natty black plastic reproduction that you can wear out and about to impress your friends. A two-piece wonder, this splendiferous noggin-enhancer is a must for anyone who loves *Star Wars*. Or just likes to look a little strange. You'll be the talk of your city/town/village/squalid bedsit! Gain friends! Charm potential lovers! Look like Darth Vader!

Okay, maybe the first few aren't true, but the last one most certainly is.

All you have to do to win is winnow out the truth from the following falsities. Remember, the Force will be with you, always.

The Dark Lord of the Sith's favourite phrase is:

a) "I love it when a plan comes together."
b) "I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts."
c) "Do not underestimate the power of the Dark Side."

With this on your noggin, you'll be able to stride round imperiously and execute subordinate admirals when they have cause to give you displeasure. (Telekinetic throat-crushing facility requires two AA type batteries.)

Darth's Shiny Helmet Compo

Please send your entries to:
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PRE-LEAPING TERMS

1. To enter, all you have to do is pick up a pen and write down the answer (either a, b or c) on the back of a postcard (or sealed down envelope), then send it in. Please remember to include your name and address.
2. You can only enter each competition on this page *once* and once only.
3. The closing date for all compos in this issue is Friday 29 August.
4. Winners' names will be published in the November issue of SFX, on sale Wednesday 1 October.
5. Absolutely no correspondence will be entered into concerning any SFX competitions. The judges' decision is final and there are no cash alternatives.
6. No employees or freelancers of Future Publishing may enter. It's naughty, you know.

Yeah, we know. It's difficult. You want to spend your life protecting the world from the intergalactic threat of alien infiltration. But what can you do? Where do you start? Those shape-shifting beggars could be anywhere.

Well, getting your hands on the *Men In Black Agent's Handbook*, which tells you how to become an elite super-cop protecting Earth from the scum of the galaxy, would be a good start. And what about flicking through the novelisation of the film *Men In Black* or the pictastic *The Making Of The Men In Black?*

We have ten sets of these three Penguin books to give away, retailing at £3.99, £5.99 and £9.99 each, so if you've always wanted to be a sartorially snappy alien-hunter, now's your chance.

Simply answer the following question to snatch the prizes: The *Men In Black* are reputed to harass witnesses of:

a) UFOs.
b) Pagan weddings.
c) Geoff Hurst in the 1966 World Cup.

So You Want To Look For Aliens Compo

WINNERS FROM SFX27

Use The Force Luke! Compo

Some of you obviously feel the Force more strongly than others and spotted five, not three differences in our visual teaser. Anyway, there were six in all: Obi-wan turns into an X-Wing; Luke's lightsabre is extended in one picture; Yoda's staff disappears; Luke's belt changes colour; Luke's boots change colour; Yoda has three toes on his left foot in the first picture and two in the second...

Now to those poster-winning 100... **Craig Rogers**, Hayes; **Alison Coverdale**, Cleveland; **Terry Garner**, Barking; **Paul Hamilton**, Inverness; **John Walke**, Bath; **Andrew Hammond**, Bracknell; **Mr Tony Davis**, Coulsdon; **M McAlonan**, Ulverston; **Nicola Day**, Broadstairs; **E Leighton**, Verwood; **Peter Saunders**, Hemel Hempstead; **Carl Wright**, Lowestoft; **RD Midgley**, Halifax; **Mr M Lightfoot**, Stanford-le-Hope; **Mr Simon Burns**, Goole; **Loise Barber**, Ivy Bridge; **Michael Higgins**, Mirfield. **Dave Telfer**, Ilford; **Michael Urquhart**, Merseyside; **Tom Ruffles**, West Winch. **Pete Fitzpatrick**, Wanstead; **S Russell**, Westham; **Jarrod Fryer**, Cannock; **P Birkett**, Northern Ireland; **Mr P G Hogg**, Clacton-on-Sea; **Mark Clapham**, Rayner's Lane; **Steven Lawley**, Eltham; **Anthony Clowes**, Oldham; **PA Benfield**, Leicester; **Phillip Wells**, Westcliff-on Sea; **Mike Bell**, Heston; **S Harder**, Frederiksberg; **M Newman**, Gloucester; **Craig Scott**, Glasgow; **JS Pathak**, Manchester; **JC McFetridge**, Belfast; **James Sherwood**, Crawley; **Tony Bufton**, Craven Arms; **D Harding**, Isleworth; **Matthew Gathercle**, Aldershot; **Donald J Makin**, Dunfermline; **Paul Carman**, Matlock; **S Young**, Maldon. **M Brett**, Helston; **A Grimley**, Bath; **Darren Williams**, Formby; **F Chick**, Penarth; **L Harrison**, Abergavenny; **R Elliott**, Torquay; **S Kibby**, Boston, **J Storey**, Wateringbury; **D Bisset** Aberdeen; **Roland Tomlison**, Billinghurst; **SM Laing**, Calderwood; **Simon Junes**, Canterbury; **R Daniels**, London; **JF Wiggell**, Oxford; **Paul Finley** Liverpool; **MJ Fox**, Portishead; **Steve Holmes**, Fareham; **S Coffey**, Gillingham; **Jim Reid**, Westwood; **Alan Livesey** Leigh; **D Mooney**, Dunstable; **Gary Lloyd**, Littlehampton; **KC Crook**, Gosport; **David Sawtell**, Weston-Super-Mare; **Graham Lally**, Kingston-Upon-Thames; **TM Addams** Nelsob; **David Williams**, Carmarthen; **D Moss**, Newcastle; **Jo Phillips**, Swansea; **Cherie Carbines**, London; **James Reid**, Glasgow; **K Cloney**, Fife; **Jill Dickinson**, Liverpool; **Mr J D White**, Norwich; **C M Reader**, Great Yarmouth; **A Kavanagh**, Ireland; **J Bignell**, Gloucestershire **T Mallett**, Newmarket; **J Baddeley**, Newcastle-Under-Lyme; **Trevor Heagin**, Nelson; **David Bateman** York; **A Quinn**, Ireland; **Mr S Kennedy**, Rothernam; **Geoff Leone**, Arbroath; **Colin Griffith**, Leeds; **R Parry**, Shrewsbury; **AJ Smith** Reading; **Nigel Parsons**, Cardiff; **Mr A R Hasley**, Barking; **Danielle Ryan** Dyfed; **Hassni Malik**, Epsom Downs; **M Fagan**, Runcorn; **M Patterson**, Belfast; **Leona Crutcher**, Bournemouth.

Evil Toothy Monsters Of The Night Compo

Vampires are destroyed by holy water! These 20 Van Helsings will be receiving their copies of *The Mammoth Book Of Dracula* imminently: D Wakefield, Dagenham; **M Fagan**, Runcorn; **Simon Worthington**, Crawley; **C Clarke**, Clevedon; **M Clapham**, Rayner's Lane; **S Geburtig**, Cambridge; **JR Jack**, Luton; **S Russell**, Westham; **W Nicholls**, Rotherham; **S Giddings**, Cambridgeshire; **K Maton**, New Tredegar; **RJ Newman**, Swindon; **R Brudenell**, Nottingham, **R Elliott**, Torquay; **T Mallett**, Newmarket; **S Longlands**, Lass; **M Pennington**, Cowley; **Iain Rockliffe**, Fife; **AR Hasley**, Barking; **D Harris**, Towcester.

The It's Big And Purple Compo

A highly stylised futuristic form of Jap animation or illustration, that's manga. Bomber jackets and copies of *Evangelion* now in the post to: P Yeung, London. **Mr M R Smith**, Bilston. **David Williams** Carmarthen: **Graham Anderson**, Glasgow: **Jo Phillips**, Swansea.

Claudia Compo

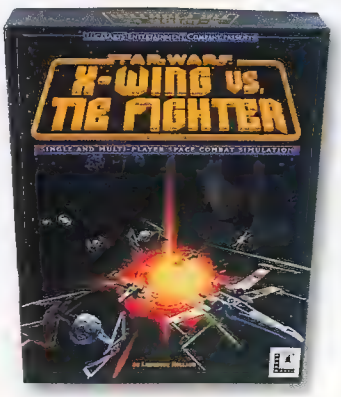
Claudia's first "sexy" single was called "Taboo." Signed *B5* vids are on their way to: J Anne, Barking; **L Potts**, Ryhill; **N Forsman**, Sweden; **Mr M R Smith**, Bilston; **H Everett**, Sheffield.

Da-DAAA da, da-DAA da, dur, da-da-da-da-de-da-daaaaa..! No, not a speech impediment, but the rousing attack on the Death Star theme from *Star Wars!* Okay, suit yourself. Dodgy representations of incidental music aside, we have a pretty stonking *Star Wars*-related offer for you this month. Ever wanted to fly your own X-Wing or give those smug rebel gits a taste of jackboot leather?

Well now you can! We have five copies of LucasArts' superlative space combat game *X-Wing Vs TIE Fighter* (retailing at £39.99; **SFX27**: A-) to give away. With fab graphics and pounding music, we reckoned it was the best thing since sliced bread. No kidding.

All you have to do to nab a free copy is win our compo! (Facilitated, of course, by using the postal system, some luck *and* getting the answer right to the following question.)

What are those things on the side of Princess Leia's head?



a) Pastry products (e.g. bagels).
b) Her hair.
c) Small whorled insect dwellings.

That's No Moon, It's A Spacestation Compo

Next Month

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OCTOBER SFX30

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Barry Sonnenfeld

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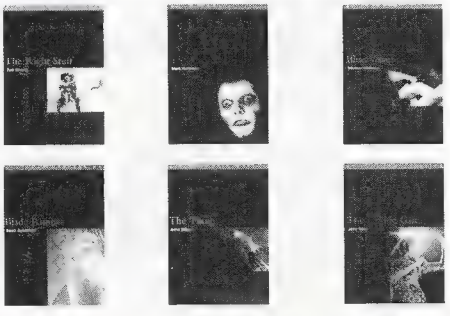
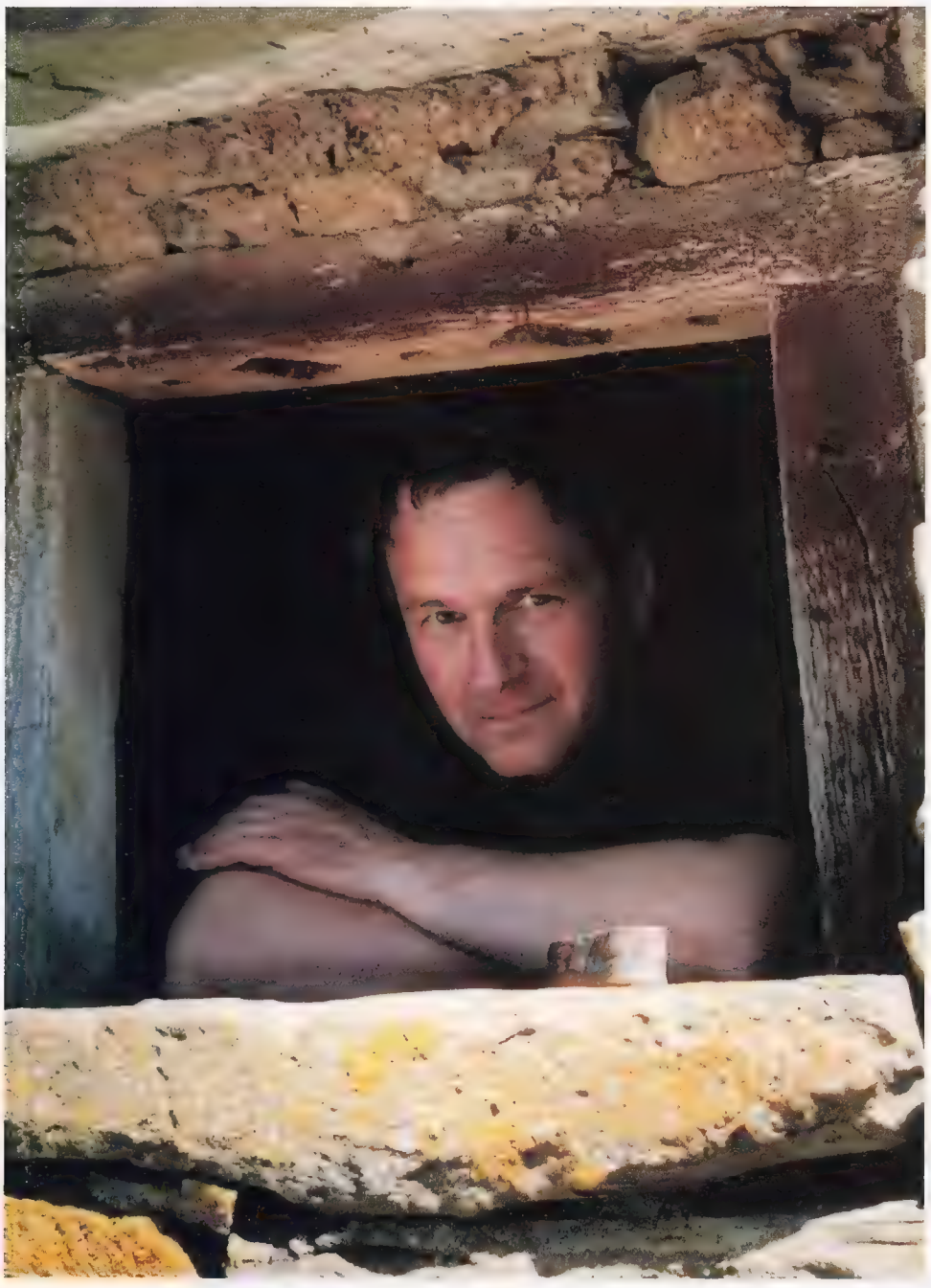


The making of a modern classic.

Bad Vibes



Keith Lewis

SFX Profile
Author Phil Rickman

Rain and mud. The Glastonbury Festival certainly got the worst of the weather this year, and if you didn't know better you'd think there was something wrong with the place. Well, according to *The Chalice* (SFX27, B-), there is. "The starting point of the book was a radio programme I did eight years ago about the Holy Grail," explains author Phil Rickman. "We went to Glastonbury to see Jeffrey Ashe, who's a big expert on the place and lives at the bottom of the Tor. We commented on how lots of people want to live there because it was a harmonious place with lots of good vibes, and he said it wasn't like that at all. When you move to Glastonbury the first thing that happens is your marriage breaks up, your health fails and your business collapses. It's not an easy place to live.

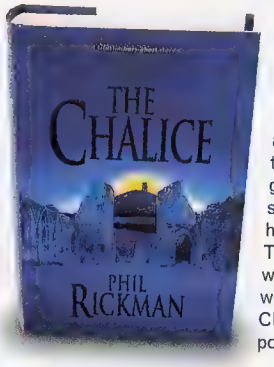
"The thought stayed with me that this would be a great idea for a book. One about a Glastonbury where people are actually having problems, instead of everybody living in a hippy haze. There are three layers to the population. There's the locals, who've been there for generations, the original hippies who've been there since the '60s and '70s, and the New Age travellers, who are not welcome so far as either of the others are concerned. So there's conflict..."

It's a character from the second group who most accurately reflects Rickman's own feelings. "Juanita's my favourite female character. She has this surface cynicism, but underneath she'd like it to be true, but she's surrounded by all these nutters who believe in it, and just can't take that sort of person."

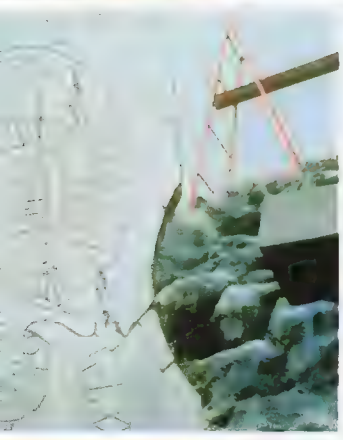
While *The Chalice* delves deep into Glastonbury's history, particularly the terrible death of Glastonbury Abbey's final Abbot, who was hung, drawn and quartered on the Tor, there's one aspect of the myth that's conspicuous by its absence. "There are so many myths, that I decided at the beginning that I wasn't going to use Arthur, and concentrated instead on the division between Christianity and paganism. I was very interested in what happened to the last Abbot, because Glastonbury was an intensely powerful Christian centre, and yet that power wasn't destroyed by pagans, but by Christians, during the Reformation."

But don't assume that means Rickman's on the pagan side. "Some of the old hippies have become bigoted. The pagan movement at the moment is going through a phase where it's almost an extension of the Green movement, but there's also a darker paganism. I suppose if there's a message in the book it's beware of extremism, whichever way it's coming from. That's why there's this loony bishop. He's not a very spiritual person in himself, but he can see there's a lot of pagans and wants to absorb them into his congregations. And that's actually happening. The Archbishop of Canterbury has embraced this movement to commemorate ancient religious sites, even though most of them are pagan!"

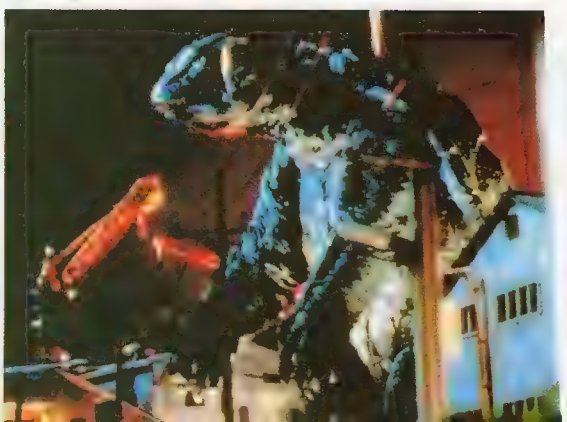
Almost as if the Church is based on organised belief, and that matters more than the nature of the belief. "I tend to mistrust organised anything. I'm not exactly an anarchist, but I'm close. Though I'm glad to see the Labour Party in power and think it's a great thing that the Tories have gone, I wish they'd got a smaller majority, as I'd hate them to get smug. That's what happens when you've got a vastly wealthy Church, and the Church becomes a political force..."



The Gamera Never Lies!



Take that, Tokyo! That ol' flying giant super-monster Gamera (known in Japan as, um, Gamera) is out to save the world from the winged Gyaos, and if a certain amount of collateral damage is caused in the process... Well, that's just unfortunate. (**NB:** It's almost traditional in *kaiju eiga* for bad monsters to trash the Tokyo Tower, and Gyaos is no exception (right).)



Behind the scenes

Colossal chelonian terror

Dubbing a Japanese movie into English is a tricky business, especially when your star is 60-foot turtle, writes MJ Simpson.

Gamera, the mighty, giant, flying, rocket-powered, radioactive, city-trashing, turtle-monster-thing, having made pretty short thrift of Tokyo, has now transferred his attention to... Shepperton! The quiet Surrey village – and its incumbent film studio – quakes as the mighty beast stomps down the main street, pounds the local post office into dust, raises its head to the sky and lets out an ear-splitting, high-pitched roar...

Well, no, clearly that's rubbish.

In fact, Gamera is in Shepperton because his critically acclaimed 1995 comeback feature is being dubbed into English. Last issue we reviewed the subtitled version of *Gamera – The Guardian Of The Universe* (**SFX28**, A) which recently opened at the Prince Charles Cinema, Leicester Square. Although this was warmly welcomed by Britain's small-but-devoted army of *kaiju eiga* fans, Arrival Films know that in order to give the film a chance of a wider release, a dubbed version is vital.

British-dubbed Japanese movies, a common sight in the '60s, are now something of a lost art. The few oriental films which do get released in the UK, such as the two *Tetsuo* features, tend to get treated as art cinema and shown subtitled. A few years ago, the anime tape *Catgirl Nuku Nuku* became the first British dub for quite some time, but obviously matters are easier with animation, where movements are more stylised and out-of-synch lips less pronounced.

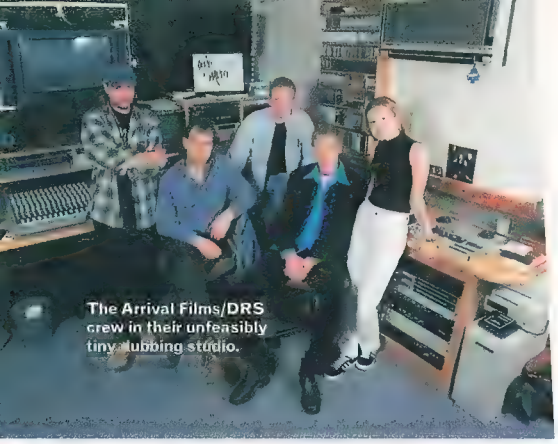
So today, seven people (plus **SFX** journo and photographer) are crammed into DRS, a tiny recording studio behind a small shop on Shepperton High Street, to participate in the first British dubbing of a Japanese monster movie for two decades. Jim Hurst is the studio manager and John Buckley the dubbing mixer/sound engineer. James Shanks is officially ADR director, Neil Craske is his assistant, Oliver Ronicle is generally "in charge," and Lara Clancy is, well, doing a voice. When Arrival Films chairman Clinton Montague turns up, the tiny room gets significantly crowded.

The English script from which Clancy is reading was written by Shanks, adapted from an English translation of the Japanese script, supplied by the film's producers, Daiei Co.

"It has to be changed a bit as we're recording so that my lines are as long as those spoken on screen." says Lara, who's playing the female lead, Nagamine, currently leaning out of a helicopter to take photos of the giant Gyaos birds. "Where my character says 'Yes,' I might have to say, 'Yes, we must,' to fit the lip movements. I can hear the Japanese actress's voice on my headphones."

A series of four beeps in her "cans," spotted onto the film by John, provides Lara's cue. The film plays on monitors in

Rob Scott



The Arrival Films/DRS crew in their unfeasibly tiny dubbing studio.

I Am A Gamera!

THE CINEMATIC CAREER OF THE LARGEST TURTLE THIS SIDE OF GREAT A'TUIN!

Year	Japanese title	English language title(s)	Opponent
1965	Dai Kaiju Gamera	**Gamera The Invincible**	Just sort of... Japan.
1966	Dai Kaiju Keto – Gamera Tai Barugon	**Gamera Vs Barugon/ War Of The Monsters**	Barugon: a giant, horned lizard-thing.
1967	Dai Kaiju Kuchusen – Gamera Tai Gyaos	**Gamera Vs Gyaos/ Return Of The Giant Monsters**	Gyaos: a huge, reptilian bird-thing.
1968	Gamera Tai Uchu Kaiju Bairasu	**Destroy All Planets**	Viras: an enormous, alien squid-thing.
1969	Gamera Tai Dai Akuju Giron	**Gamera Vs Guiron/ Attack Of The Monsters**	Guiron: a massive, blade-headed monster
1970	Gamera Tai Maju Jyaga	**Gamera Vs Jiger/ Gamera Vs Monster X**	Jiger: a humongous, spiky dinosaur-thing.
1971	Gamera Tai Shinkai Kaiju Jigura	**Gamera Vs Zigra**	Zigra: an oversized, extra-terrestrial fish-thing.
1980	Uchu Kaiju Gamera	**Gamera, Super Monster**	All of the above.
1995	Gamera Dai Kaiju Kuchusen	**Gamera – The Guardian Of The Universe**	Uh-oh, it's Gyaos, again!
1996	Gamera 2 Region Shurai	**Gamera 2 – Attack Of Legion**	Legion: millions of insect-things that combine to form one insect-thing.

Ayako Fujitani, who plays psychic schoolgirl Asagi Kusanagi, is actually Steven Seagal's daughter!

"I get to be the director because, well, I've got a beard!" James Shanks

both the mixing room and the studio itself, and is constantly run back and forth, with anything up to ten takes of each line.

"The dubbed version is going to be aimed more at young people who may never have actually seen a Japanese monster movie before," explains Ronicle, "so we're replacing the original music with a techno soundtrack. It'll feature some big names, but under pseudonyms, and will be released on CD. We're also beefing up Gamera's roar, which is a bit high-pitched. New audiences are going to be expecting something meatier.

"We know purists will disapprove of the dubbing and these other changes, which is why we're also releasing the subtitled version. And it's worth stressing that we're only altering the soundtrack – we're not re-editing the film in any way."

The entire dubbing procedure takes approximately eight weeks, employs the talents of around 20 actors, often recording individually.

"There are four leads and three major supporting roles," says Shanks. "Then there are all the extras who only have a few lines. We use, on average, one actor for every five characters, and stagger their roles through the film, so they should never be in a scene with themselves. I get to be the director because, well, because I've got a beard and a hat!"

"I've been making Super-8 films since I was about eight. Last year I finished my first feature, *Devil's Harvest,* which hasn't been released yet. It stars Brian Blessed and Julie T Wallace. Lara is in it too, as are most of the British *Gamera* cast, because for this we wanted actors we could trust. It's a supernatural thriller – sort of *Fatal Attraction* meets *The Amityville Horror.*"

James has now seen *Gamera – The Guardian Of The Universe* about 100 times, although Clancy has never seen it before today. In fact, she's recording each line as she goes along, and is by now intrigued to find out what happens to her character in the end.

"I've always loved Godzilla and other Japanese monsters," says Shanks, "and although I knew of Gamera, I'd never actually seen one of his films until this came along."

Which isn't so surprising considering that no Gamera film has ever been shown on British TV or released on video. Until recently, the only way to get to know the turtle's *oeuvre* was to make frequent trips to America or know a good bootleg dealer. Hopefully, all that's going to change now Arrival Films have acquired the rights to *Gamera's* back catalogue (see boxout), under the watchful eye of Clinton Montague, who saw *Gamera* at Cannes two years ago.

"Other people were also interested in *Gamera,*" explains Ronicle, "but Clinton got it because he knew what he wanted to do with it. He wanted to release it as a good, fun monster movie, and Daiei liked that. We've got first option on the sequel, *Gamera 2 – Attack Of Legion,* which is even better.

"A lot of money is being spent on this, because if the dubbing is bad, it sticks out a mile – especially on the big screen. So often in the past, films have been badly dubbed because the recording has been rushed. We're spending a lot of time on this making sure we get it right"

Both dubbed and subtitled versions of *Gamera* will be released on video next year, to coincide roughly with the cinematic release of Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin's *Godzilla.* This will be followed by video releases of the original '60s films.

"As with the 1995 movie, we'll be working from the Japanese masters and recording our own dubbed soundtracks," says Ronicle, "so our versions will be different to the ones people might have seen on American tapes or bootlegs. But we won't be releasing subtitled versions, because it's far too expensive, and anyway the old *Gamera* movies are more obviously aimed at young children."

In order to fit Gamera and Gyaos into the studio, they had to be shrunk considerably...

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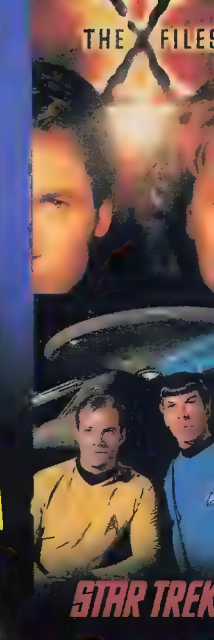


Jacqueline Cullen as feisty sorceress-in-training Maeve: providing the love interest for Sinbad, eye candy for the male viewers, and a magical element to the action. Below right is a CGI rock giant, an example of the show's top special effects.

"Sinbad is just a guy. He has no magical abilities or super-strength. It's just brains and athleticism."

HA-HA, MR NAHA...

The Golden Voyage Of Ed

ED NAHA, ONE-TIME FANGORIA EDITOR AND LATELY CREATOR OF HOT NEW TV FANTASY SERIES THE ADVENTURES OF SINBAD, TALKS SWORDFIGHTS, JACUZZIS AND FLYING LIONS WITH MJ SIMPSON.

"I'd fallen in love with Sinbad when I was 11," says screenwriter, novelist and top SF journo Ed Naha. "I hadn't seen any of the movies at that point, but I used to read *Famous Monsters Of Filmland* and they had an article on Ray Harryhausen and ran stills. So eventually I caught up with them."

The urge to film *Sinbad* was put on the back-burner for a few years while Naha concentrated on writing novels and screenplays, and editing US horror mag *Fangoria*. A treatment for a Sinbad movie sat on his word-processor, but for a long time nobody believed there was any potential in fantasy adventure...

"About a year and a half ago I was up at All American Television and we were talking about fantasy action series. They said, 'Would you be interested in something along the lines of *Sinbad?*' So I said, 'If you can wait a day, I can get you 60 pages!' So I went home, found my movie treatment, added characters, and basically within a week, All American bought the series. Then about a week later Atlantis Films joined in. Then we sold it here in the States to Tribune Syndication and we were up and running."

Naha's movie treatment became the series' feature-length pilot, and Naha himself became executive producer, overseeing the whole project with All American Television's president David Gerber, whose previous credits include *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea, Quark, thirtysomething* and – bizarrely – *The Double Deckers!*

Another fine mess: Sinbad creator, ex-*Fangoria* editor, Corman *alumnus* and massive Stan & Ollie fan Ed Naha.

"David has been in TV for ever. He has more awards in his closet than I have shirts. And the nice thing about it is, he and I share a passion for old movies, so we can talk in shorthand. Whenever we're thinking of changing direction rather than us go at it in terms of Hollywood buzzwords, he'll say something along the lines of 'Akim Tamiroff!'* And I'll go 'Yes, or perhaps Turhan Bey!'* And he and I'll know what we're talking about."

So how much does Naha's pet project owe to that TV fantasy trailblazer *Hercules?* "It certainly paved the way for us," admits Naha, "but our take is different, in that whereas Hercules is the son of a god, Sinbad is just a guy with no magical abilities and no super-strength. It's all brains and athletic prowess. In terms of the magical aspects of it, we have a character, Maeve, who's a sorcerer's apprentice, but she's not exactly up to speed on her spells. So it makes for some nice give and take.

"We also have a sort of a Leonardo da Vinci type called Farouz, who invents things but never writes stuff down. So his inventions are lost until someone reinvents them hundreds of years later. He comes up with a hang-glider, dynamite, a sort of a laser beam... But when anyone asks him, 'Aren't you going to write this down?' he just points to his head, 'Nah, it's all up here.' Probably the most fun is that he actually invents the jacuzzi! Not only does he invent it, but it actually plays a pivotal role. We just sat there at the end of the day, saying, 'I can't believe we've got a jacuzzi! I can't believe that it plays a part in the story.'

"Then we have Dubar, Sinbad's older brother, and a knife-throwing dwarf whose tongue has been cut out, for reasons that we don't know initially. And the crew is rounded out by Dermot, Maeve's familiar, who's a hawk. We're very fortunate in that Jacqueline [Collen], who plays Maeve, just loves animals."

Although *Sinbad* is very much an *ensemble* piece, its success depends largely on Zen Gesner's great portrayal of the title character.

"We had open casting for Sinbad, and had about 25 people in the end reading 'sides'

Fantastic Journo

ED NAHA TALKS ABOUT LIFE AT THE PRESSES WITH MJ SIMPSON.

One of the reasons Ed Naha is so easy to interview is that he's been involved in science, sci-fi and horror magazine publishing for quite some time. In the '70s he worked on the SF movie mag *Starlog*, along with two sister titles, the horror mag *Fangoria* (which he founded) and the popular science mag *Future Life*.

"I was one of the editors and half the staff of *Starlog*. I had 12 different names – which is great training, by the way. I'd come in in the morning and I'd be writing a science article on spacestations for one of the magazines. Then somebody would come in and say, 'We need three pages on Lou Ferrigno by 3pm.' Oh fine! But that was a lot of fun.

"I used to be an A&R man at Columbia Records. And I totally burnt out after *Born To Run*, because – boy! – that was like pulling teeth, getting that out. So I answered an ad in the *New York Times* and went up to meet Kerry O'Quinn who was one of *Starlog's* publishers. It was such a tiny, tiny place! The editor-in-chief's office at that time was a reconverted storage closet. His desk was positioned longways so he wouldn't have to climb over it to get to his chair.

"When I started working there, they moved to bigger offices, but they were still small: two people in an office with their desks facing each other, so it looked like a Ferrante and Teicher piano set-up. It was hysterical – like a Marx Brothers movie with ferns!"

The intriguingly monikered Zen Gesner (yes, he was named after that branch of Buddhist philosophy) plays Sinbad, indulging in much buckling of swash against CGI monsters like the serpentine beastie above.

[script pages used in auditions]. Basically, Zen didn't tell us very much about himself. We just felt that he embodied Sinbad. Later we found out he's an expert swordsman – he went to school at LAMDA in London, earned an advanced certificate from the Society of British Fight Directors and was actually the assistant fight director at the Royal Opera House! This guy was born to play Sinbad."

Apart from the swordfights, another crucial aspect of the show is the special effects. Like its contemporaries, *Sinbad* benefits from the availability and relative cheapness of CGI, which means that weekly TV series can have movie-quality effects for a fraction of the cost.

"Thank God for CGI! Because, being knowledgeable of what it takes [to do stop-motion], I realised that you can't use that technique on a weekly series. We were very fortunate in finding an effects house in Toronto that's headed by a fellow who loves all those old [Harryhausen] movies. It's hard work, but at the end of the day, when you see the show, it's like we're doing a Saturday matinee every week.

"We use more computer-generated imagery than any other show on TV, with the possible exception of certain space shows. We've used every kind of effect you can imagine. The first season we have sea serpents, a rock giant, harpies, a cyclops, a giant goat... We've completed one episode where we have Sinbad and his crew attacked by 200 skeletons. And we have this one thing that's like a floating eyeball with tentacles – it looks like something after 12 gin and tonics!"

The above notwithstanding, Naha has no doubt that it's the strength of the scripts which makes *Sinbad* the success it is.

Apart from Ed himself, other writers include Michael Cassutt *(Twilight Zone, Max Headroom)*, James Novack (the short-lived 1988 series *Probe)* and novelist John Shirley. Shirley and Naha between them wrote the "Traveller" SF novels under the pseudonym "DB Drumm." Naha's first novel, *The Paradise Plot*, was written while he was still on *Starlog*.

"Well, actually that was published because I was pissed off. *Future Life* were having a series on what life on a spacestation would be like. Everyone was writing these articles where everything's going to be perfect. We're all going to kiss and hug and play Donovan records. So when it came for me to do the chapter, I was wondering what would happen if you had a loose cannon up there. Well, I was called into the publishers' office and they skinned me alive!

"Then I went out one day with an editor from Bantam and we got lacquered and started complaining about attitudes. When people looked to the future, they were always expecting pie in the sky. I said people are people, so she said, 'Why don't you do up a little outline?'

"Now, at this point, apart from Sherlock Holmes, I'd never read a mystery. So I went to a book store and I said, 'I'd like $30-worth of mystery novels.' They said 'Do you want the good stuff or The Crap That Sells?' so I said, 'Well, how about half and half?' I read a lot of crap, and then I fell in love with people like Chandler and Hammett. So I handed in this outline and they bought it and I got the book out. And it did well enough that I did the second one, *The Suicide Plague*. Then I felt cocky enough in 1980 that I had enough freelance stuff going on to pay my rent.

"I figured, 'Well, I've been in New York for ten years. Gee, maybe I'll pack up and go to California.' So I came out here with no plans at all and walked into Roger Corman's office – by that time we knew each other – and said, 'It's about time I wrote a movie for you.'"

CORMAN, OF COURSE, IS BETTER KNOWN FOR the quantity of the films he's produced than the quality... So, Mr Naha, exactly what was the name of this movie you wrote for Mr Corman?

"Oh God!" cringes Naha. "Eventually it wasn't so much released as let loose! It was a grotesquely unfunny comedy called *Oddballs*. Then I did a fantasy adventure for him that was filmed in Argentina. That was hideous, called *Wizard Wars*. And it did so well on tape that they had a sequel."

After a little research, **SFX** eventually manage to identify *Wizard Wars* as having surfaced in 1983 under the title *Wizards Of The Lost Kingdom,* replete with an illustration showing a winged lion who never appears in the film!

"This was bad filming," says Naha. "90% of the actors were speaking their lines in English phonetically. And they would just drop stuff. We had one entire speech, a pivotal speech, dropped. And the line that the actor read instead was 'Good! Good! Varrry good!' And I'm going 'Holy Jeez...'

"I wrote 400 post-production loop-lines for this movie. By the time they cut together the usable footage, we had 62 minutes. So Roger, undaunted, went out and assembled 20 minutes of footage from other fantasy films that he had done. And that was both the prologue – which had nothing to do with the movie – and during the movie, three or four times, characters have flashbacks to other movies!

"At a certain point, I found myself behind a Moviola. Now I had never seen a Moviola, let alone worked on one. And I'm in an attic in Venice, California, and it's about 120 degrees, and I'm looking at bad footage from Argentina. And I just thought, 'You know, life doesn't get much better than this!' I'll just tell you this. We had a flying lion that was supposed to be in the movie. They had a costume, the wings, and a crane. Well, the director got fired, so the lead actor and the Argentinian producer decided that they were going to direct the film themselves. So the first thing they did was cut out the lion. Unfortunately, the lion was the sidekick. So they took off the wings. Now you had a guy in a lion suit who looked like he was Nana the dog in a bad production of *Peter Pan*.

"So they said, 'Well, why don't we just stand him up?' So now there's a guy standing up in a lion suit. It looked like someone in seedy pyjamas. So they covered him in fur. Now they had something that looked like something the cat threw up. So to really polish it off, they covered the fur with yak hair. Basically, in this movie the young wizard has a sidekick that looks like a six-foot-three, white hairball with bell-bottom legs! It was a mess."

After his stint with Corman, Naha worked with that other *impresario* of cheese, Charles Band, for whom he wrote the script for *Troll*.

"I don't even want to go into *Troll*, man! I wrote it and then hid. A whole bunch of us went to see it on opening night, and somebody brought a bottle of tequila into the theatre. It didn't take me long to know I'd need it. So afterwards we were holding a kind of wake for the movie and somebody from the studio gave me the best compliment I've ever had on that film: 'You know, if you closed your eyes, it sounded good'! Oh great; now I have a career in radio!"

"We have this floating eyeball with tentacles – it looks like something after 12 gin and tonics!"

Another Charles Band film on which Naha worked was *Dolls*. It was here that he met Stuart Gordon. The two then created the hugely successful *Honey I Shrunk The Kids*.

"Stuart's an amazing man," enthuses Naha. "He and Brian Yuzna, who did *Re-Animator* and *Dolls*, wanted to do a movie that their kids could see. We all sat down and came up with this idea. I did a treatment and Disney flipped out over it. My only regret is that Stuart didn't get the chance to direct it."

For now, Naha's film and novel careers are on hold, while he concentrates on *Sinbad*. As far as he's concerned, the appeal of the series lies primarily in its simplicity and honesty.

"I think it's nice to sit down with a show where there is a hero, and he basically isn't embarrassed to be a hero. It's just 'I'm a hero. Hello! You're bad. I'll get ya.'

"I think that, in terms of the recent revival in fantasy action on TV, people kind of crave that. They like to see a world where, at the end of the day, you can come home and turn on the TV and see someone who has problems that are slightly different and a lot more grotesque than yours. Which is worse: dealing with a teacher you hate or a 60-foot tall carnivorous cyclops? Although often they do feel the same."

The Adventures Of Sinbad *is airing on Sky One from Saturday 16 August at 5pm.*

** Turhan Bey was in '40s spook-flicks such as* The Mad Ghoul *and* The Mummy's Tomb; *Akim Tamiroff was a character actor who worked from the '30s to the '70s.*

BREAKING THE RULES

AS DS9'S ENDEARING IF IRRITATINGLY NAÏVE ROM, **MAX GRODÉNCHIK** IS ALWAYS PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE TO QUARK. STUART BANKS TALKS TO THE MOST ATYPICAL FERENGI ABOUT LIFE ON THE FRONTIER.

"When I was a kid I wanted to be a cowboy," confesses city boy Max Grodénchik, "but I soon gave up when I realised there weren't any cows in New York." So the thwarted cowherd did what only a respectable thwarted cowherd could – he became an actor.

Grodénchik, who plays Rom in *Deep Space Nine*, first got started in the *Trek* universe in 1990, in *The Next Generation* episode "Captain's Holiday." "I got a call from my agent asking me if I wanted to play a Ferengi called Sovak," remembers Grodénchik, "but he had no idea what a Ferengi was – and neither did I! So I asked my then room-mate, who knew what a Ferengi was and explained it to me. I didn't believe him, so I asked my brother, who's a science fiction fan, and he described them as profit-motivated capitalist beings. But I was still none the wiser, so at the audition, in front of producers Rick Berman, Michael Piller, David Livingstone and director Chip Chalmers, I pleaded ignorance and explained what my room-mate and brother had told me. Based on this, I read my lines and Chip Chalmers said: 'Tell your brother and room-mate that we may have jobs for them.' That's when I knew I'd got the part. I really enjoyed myself working with the cast, especially Patrick Stewart, who kept telling me I'd be back because everybody enjoyed my work."

© Paramount Inc.

(Above) Rom, now a technician, hangs out at Quark's, where he used to work as a "mere" bartender. (Above right) Rom's son, Nog, is now in Starfleet.

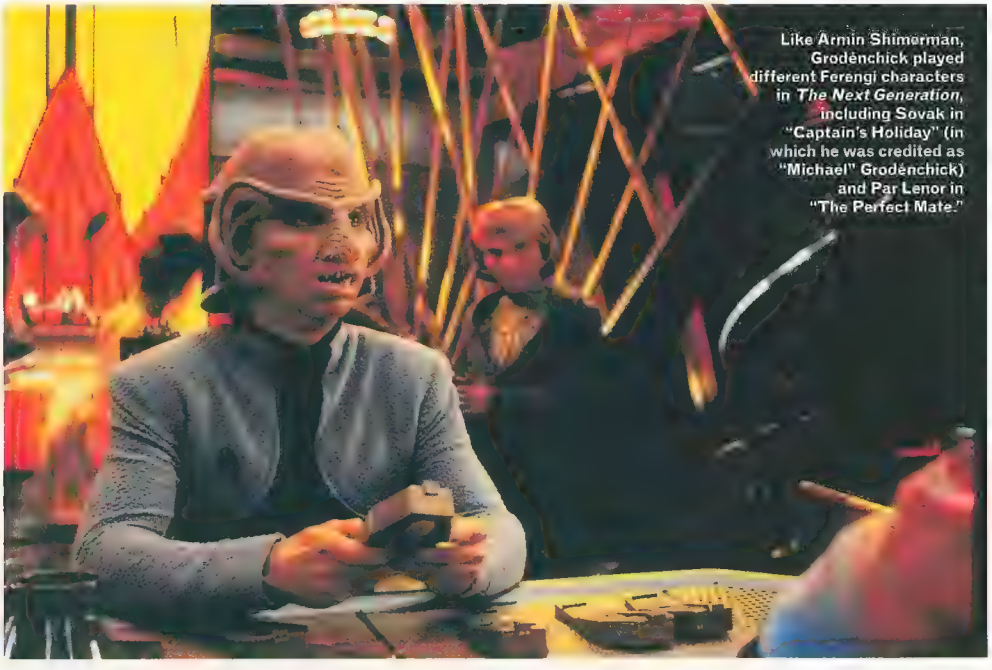
And Picard, as always, was right. Before long Grodénchik was asked back to play another Ferengi, Par Lenor, in the *TNG* fifth season episode, "Perfect Mate." It was an easy day, remembers Grodénchik. "Michael Schneider – the other Ferengi – and I were basically there to speed the plot along and to get the metamorph to hatch quicker. I was in and out by noon, so I enjoyed it."

However, something Grodénchik didn't enjoy was the time he spent at acting school in Berkeley, California. He readily admits that he never learnt anything about his craft there.

"All they taught me was how to relax, which was a waste of time, because I'll never be able to do that."

Having completed his course, Grodénchik first professional parts took him to San Francisco to work with director Sam Shepherd, after which he returned to New York for seven years. But it was a move to Los Angeles that really kickstarted his career in television and cinema, including appearances in *Apollo 13*, *Sister Act*, *The Rocketeer*, *Barton Fink* and horror flick *Rumplestiltskin*. However, to many he is still best known as the rather contemptible Rom, a role he got by being, um, all ears in the make-up trailer.

"At the time I did 'Perfect Mate,' the talk on set was about the 'new' *Deep Space Nine*, and the best place for rumours is the make-up department, because in the trailer you hear



Like Armin Shimerman, Grodénchick played different Ferengi characters in *The Next Generation*, including Sovak in "Captain's Holiday" (in which he was credited as "Michael" Grodénchick) and Par Lenor in "The Perfect Mate."

"ARMIN SHIMERMAN CLAIMS HE GOT ME THE ROLE AND THAT I STILL OWE HIM 10%!"

everything, especially when you're under all that prosthetic. Nobody thinks you can hear. The trouble is, they all talk so loud, you can pick up a lot of information. They were talking about having a Ferengi on the show, so I got in for the audition quick!"

But in an apparent cruel twist of fate, all did not go well at the audition. "I thought I did an awful job," remembers Grodénchik with visible embarrassment. "I was sitting on the steps outside sulking when Armin Shimerman came out and asked what the matter was. When I explained, he told me not to worry, saying that it was between the two of us. When he got the job he said that they were going to give Quark a relation, probably a father, which became Rom. Armin still claims he got me the role and that I still owe him 10%!"

For Grodénchik, the hardest part about playing Rom is speaking clearly with those terrible teeth. "The best I can hope for is that people understand me. It's difficult because of the way they fit to say 'p' or 'n.' So that's how the stutter came about. It just became more comfortable to talk like that."

Despite the dental difficulties, Grodénchik still finds Rom a wonderful character to play. "I think his growth has been one of the most fascinating aspects of the part. If you go back to the first season, to the episode 'Man Alone,' there was a scene between him and Kieko O'Brien, where you see Rom, for the first time, step out from under Ferengi tradition and Quark's remonstrations – and that's when we see his first step to becoming his own man. When he decides to send Nog to Keiko's school, there was a seed of change planted there which developed and made Rom what he is today. There's a sense in which Rom knows he hasn't turned out too well, but now that he has been able to stand up for Nog, he is learning not to be frightened and to stand up for himself."

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"I REALLY WANTED TO BE A COWBOY WHEN I GREW UP, BUT THERE WEREN'T COWS IN NEW YORK."

Rom's knowledge of the unofficial patch-up jobs done on the computer in Quark's bar come in handy in the episode "Our Man Bashir."

Odo and Quark might not see eye to eye, but the Constable's opinion of Rom seems to be that he's a complete buffoon.

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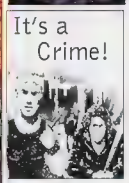

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"IT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU WOULD
TAKE YOUR DATE TO
AND EXPECT HER TO COME OUT
AND ENJOY. WE WOULD
NEED TO GO BACK AND ADD
A FEW FUCKS." TODD MCFARLANE

TODD'S SPAWN

HELL SPAWN

EX-MARVEL MAN **TODD MCFARLANE** WAS DERIDED WHEN HE SET UP IMAGE COMICS AND CREATED SPAWN... NOW IT'S ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL COMIC STRIPS EVER AND BEING MADE INTO A LIVE-ACTION FILM, AS ITS CREATOR TELLS STUART BANKS.

Todd McFarlane is not a happy man. The live-action *Spawn* movie is facing a long series of difficulties getting its PG-13 certification in the US before its scheduled release date of Friday 8 August. They've just cut the print again for its final presentation for certification the next day. And McFarlane is quite prepared to let anybody within shouting distance know exactly what he thinks about it.

"The movie was always intended to be a PG-13;" he barks, "whereas the animated HBO series is R rated [restricted], and I don't have a problem with that. It was intended to be hard-edged, and on some levels not for kids. HBO are being responsible by putting it on at midnight on cable. The movie is intended to be a much softer version of the animated series. I mean, it's soft already, but they want to make it softer! We'll find out tomorrow. We give them our last cut then. They've already rejected us three times. And after tomorrow we don't have any more time to basically piss around with it."

But McFarlane readily admits that the movie's not exactly your average PG-13 material. "I think part of the problem is that we've got this guy from Hell and I think the sticking point is, 'How do you make that palatable for audiences on a day-to-day basis? You just don't talk about Hell out loud, right?"

(Left) Director Mark Dippe is an ex-ILM special effects guy.

Producer Clint Goldman, creator Todd McFarlane and director Mark Dippe – the creative force behind the movie.

It's a strange comment for a man who doesn't just talk about Hell out loud, but writes about if for a living. But his sarcastic quip is typical of a writer who's got a reputation as, well, something of a control freak. After all, that's why he left Marvel to publish the mega-successful creator-owned *Spawn* comics in the first place. That's why he owns the toy company which produces the range of figures based on *Spawn*. That's why he's intrinsically involved in the *Spawn* animated series. That's why, many would argue, *Spawn* (and the toys and the animated series...) is so bloody good...

But it begs the question: if he's had to cut all these things from the movie, and it's still not getting the right certification, wouldn't it be far easier just to put everything back in and release it as an R rated film?

"Here's where the problem comes in. The film was intended from the get-go to be a PG-13. It was never shot to be an R movie! So even if they give it an R rating, anyone over the age of 20 won't find it sophisticated enough to keep them entertained more than once through. You might go, 'Yeah there's a couple of cool effects,' but there really isn't anything that's a true

Clockwise from top: There's no padding in he Spawn costume – those are all actor Jai White's own muscles; the budget wouldn't stretch to a Batmobile, but McFarlane promises a script a lot better than the latest Bat movies; don't worry about the lack of a cloak, *Spawn* comics fans, it does make an appearance or two; so just who did kill Al Simmons, and thus free his wife to go off and marry his best friend?; The Clown is sent by Spawn's creators to pester him and make sure he doesn't stray from his mission.

"WHEN YOU ARE CATERING FOR THE YOUTH AUDIENCE, WHEN YOU PUT IN A LOT OF SPECIAL EFFECTS, THEY DON'T WANT ANYTHING TO GET IN THE WAY OF THEM." TODD MCFARLANE

R-movie about it. It's not something you would take your date to and expect her to come out and enjoy. We would need to go back and add a few fucks! I mean we didn't have any excessive violence, swearing or nudity that push films over to an R rating. All we have is this cool little roller-coaster ride. But the guy is from Hell – although the ratings people can't actually use that to not make the film a PG-13. They're not allowed to take a theme and discriminate against it. Instead they come up with things like, 'It's too violent!' It's not too violent! Hey, come on, what are you talking about?"

So is it going to make the grade this time?

"If they say we are an R, then fuck it! We're an R and we'll just put everything back in. Although I still don't believe that we've got an R movie, even with everything in it!"

Does he wish that with the benefit of hindsight he *had* made it an R film? "No. The HBO animated series is the stuff that I think the older fans will get off on. But those who are into the animated series are on some level going to be disappointed with the film, because it isn't like that. The PG-13 enables you to expose it to more people. Basically, the film is designed to appeal to the adolescent crowd."

McFarlane is quick to point out, however, that this is not going to be like the big screen treatment afforded that other well known comic book hero, Batman...

"*Batman* this ain't! I bet he never had any difficulty in getting his PG-13 rating. Trying to compare it to *Batman* is like taking a step backwards. This is far cooler! One of the difficulties we had was that in the comic book Spawn has a living cape which is huge; in the film this would be difficult to do and it'd draw too many comparisons to superheroes like Batman. I wanted to try and give it more of a science fiction feel. The costume is really organic looking, so when the cape is used it comes out of his back, which avoids having it around all the time and doesn't make a big deal of it. And if you're a Spawn fan you're going to know it's his costume – it hasn't changed from grey and blue to black, like Batman's."

But there have been a few compromises bringing the character to the silver screen, surely? "Given the intended target audience, as long as I could still get it to be cool and edgy, like the comic book, then that was good. We couldn't get into the comics' philosophical stuff because you only have two hours. Also, some of the heavy brow-beating wouldn't play well on the screen – unless it was an R."

Oh dear, not that again!

"If I was going to make it an R I would make it more intellectual. But when you have this audience who want something that is just like loud music, they don't really want to worry about debating anything philosophical. The trouble is, when you are catering for the youth audience, what we've found out over here, when you put in a lot of special effects, they don't want anything to get in the way of them. So you end up kind of painting yourself into a corner. Otherwise they just tap their toes wondering when the next special effect is coming. But for me, if you're 22 or older, you have to give them some meat and potatoes between the special effects."

"How do you write a film about about a guy from hell and make it acceptable for PG audiences?" ponders McFarlane.

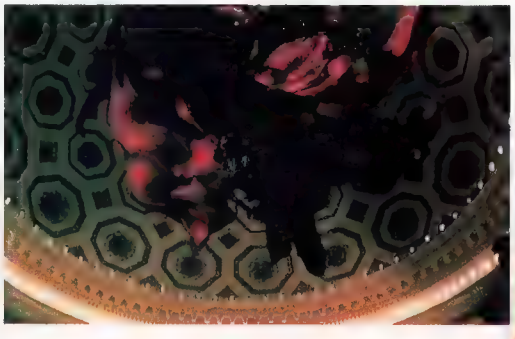
SPAWN MAY BE DEVELOPING INTO A STAR TREK-like franchise now – comics, toys, books, animated TV series, movie – but the character actually started life as a mere schoolboy sketch:

"Us comic book geeks, we always doodle, saying, 'Oh I'm going to create my own superheroes someday.' I even did a little comic book with Spawn when I was in school, and the logo hasn't changed much, especially with the skull in the middle.

"When I left Marvel and formed Image Comics, we had to create new characters. I liked the character of Spawn, so I pulled him out of my portfolio. But not being a good writer, I found that the best way to make him come alive was to write him from my own life experiences. Wanda is named after my wife, and the girl is named after my little girl. And that's how we got started."

But what's made *Spawn* so successful? It's not just the violence, according to McFarlane.

"I think the reason *Spawn* works is because it's something your parents don't quite agree with. Like loud music. They don't understand Generation X; the way they dress or dance. I think that's what's so appealing about *Spawn*. And even if you're 35 you can still have that



attitude. When it came to the film I didn't want to just do a literal translation of the comic. There are things that work well in one genre and not the other, so it was important to play to the strengths of the genre that you're working in. But if we make this thing soft and round it's just going to become faceless."

With the comics selling in excess of eight million issues worldwide, and generating a huge merchandising industry in the process, it was a inevitable that Hollywood would one day be beating a path to McFarlane's door. At first Columbia Pictures showed an interest, but when that fell through, the option was picked up by New Line Cinema who were fastidious enough to give McFarlane what he wanted: that all-important creative control. "The whole thing is not about doing a $100 million movie, but making the right movie, and New Line Cinema were able to give me that."

Fortunately for McFarlane, the practicalities of making the film were helped by his long-time association with the director and producer – ex-effects guys Mark Dippe and Clint Goldman – who have worked on various films with Industrial Light And Magic. "My contract is tied to theirs, and they're pretty good eyes and ears for me. They, along with Steve Williams, who does the special effects, form part of a close-knit team, and they share my vision. If we failed then they could sack us and do what they wanted. But [New Line Cinema] are happy with what we've done..."

A self-confessed non-writer, McFarlane also brought on board scripter Alan McElroy, who boasts *Halloween IV*, among others, on his *resumé*. A weird choice, considering he wasn't particularly *au fait* with the original comics. "He was recommended, and I'm pleased with the job he did. Once Alan came on, Mark was able to pass on to him what I wanted. There were some cool ideas I hadn't put in the comics which I decided would go well in the movie. When I finally met Alan, I decided that this was the guy who I wanted to write the animated series too. I've also got him working on a new book called *The Curse Of Spawn*."

But when it came to casting, McFarlane was canny enough to listen to his associates' opinions. "As a business person and a creative person, you don't want to have too much control, otherwise you end up being a dictator. The fine line is getting what I want, but making sure that everyone is made to feel part of a team. I know what it's like to be a creative person who has no say over what he does."

As for Michael Jai White, who plays Spawn, Mc Farlane is *very* pleased... "Because we didn't have a big budget, we looked for people who would be able to convey the character under a hell of a lot of make-up. Michael has a nice intensity that suited the role, and is very athletic. I mean, he's solid. Those muscles under the costume are his! That ain't no padding! This is not like Clooney or Kilmer."

As the film approaches its Friday 8 August opening in the US (October in the UK), McFarlane is already hard at work on further *Spawn* projects. The animated series has been picked up for a second season and he's hoping to make enough episodes to sell them abroad as a package.

And as far as the film certification goes, if the new flick gets its desired PG-13, not to worry because there *will* be a director's cut: "We had to take out a lot of the intensity, so that's what we'll put back in," he adds.

SPAWN THE COMIC

SO WHAT'S THIS DOLLAR-BUSTING COMIC GOT THAT OTHERS HAVEN'T THEN?

Back in 1992, *Spawn* was one of the most eagerly awaited comic debuts ever, its writer/artist Todd McFarlane having already caused a storm at Marvel, particularly with his work on *Spider-Man*. But the man was also a maverick, determined to do things his way, and *Spawn* was his chance to show what doing things his way actually meant. He'd split from Marvel and created Image Comics with a mission to kick ass in the comics world. And, boy, did he kick ass... As soon as issue one hit the shelves it leapt into the record books as one of the best-selling comics ever.

Spawn's main character is Al Simmons, a government operative who ends up in hell after being killed by another operative. There he reveals to the demon Malebolgia that he'd do anything to see his wife again. The demon takes him at his word and sends Simmons back to Earth... But merged with a neural hell parasite and transformed into the creature now known as Spawn.

He has amazing powers (not fully defined, but he has been known to teleport, fly, fire blasts of energy and revive the dead), but naturally there's a price to pay. The more he uses them, the quicker they'll run out and his time on Earth will be at an end. In fact, the diabolical Malebolgia is using this period to see whether Spawn will make a suitable leader for his armies in a future invasion of our world.

On returning to Earth, however, Simmons finds that wife Wanda has remarried to his best friend, and accepts that she has now found a happiness he never gave her. So he decides instead to create a new identity for himself, seek revenge on the man who ordered his death and try to find a way to break his contract with Malebolgia.

Now over 60 issues old, the story continues to be a crazy rollercoaster ride, introducing some of the coolest comic characters of the last decade, including:

- The Clown (and his evil alter ego The Violator), a hellspawn creature sent to dog Spawn and keep him on his toes and at odds with Earth authorities.
- Angela, an angel devoted to eradicting Hellspawn.
- Overtkill, a bionic Mafia hitman.
- Tremor, a failed Mafia attempt to create a super-enhanced man-beast, who forms an uneasy alliance with Spawn when the Mafia kill his family.
- Medieval Spawn, a, um, medieval version of Spawn, don't you know.

In every respect, *Spawn* has radically pushed the comic format into new territory, providing more interesting, sexier and increasingly violent stories that have proved hugely popular with the comic-buying public.

Spawn was a revolutionary comic which challenged the complacency of Marvel and DC, and it became a massive worldwide best-seller as a result. It's been running for over five years now and has sired a range of toys...

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WILL STARGATE, THE BIG SCREEN SF HIT OF 1994, MAKE IT TO THE TV INTACT? "IT'S NOT A LIMITED SERIES," EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS **JONATHAN GLASSNER** AND **BRAD WRIGHT** TELL CHUCK WAGNER.

One of the new planets the series visits is Chulak (which looks strangely like British Columbia) but the aliens from Abydos (below) follow them there.

Hit movies either spawn sequels or TV series – and, on balance, neither match up to the original. *Logan's Run* the TV version was a typically banal slice of '70s sci-fi, while *Beyond Westworld* was so bad it's a surprise the film's director Michael Crichton didn't sue for defamation of character. But there are exceptions, notably *Alien Nation*, which matured into an excellent series that explored themes the movie only touched upon. And it's into this rare category that the producers of *Stargate SG-1* hope their creation will fall.

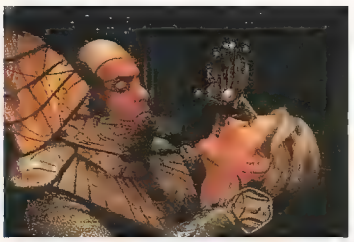
Not that the omens are all good. *Stargate* director Roland Emmerich is allegedly none too keen on the series going ahead, although executive producers Jonathan Glassner and Brad Wright can at least take heart that production company Trilogy are so confident they've got a hit on their hands that they've already commissioned 44 episodes to follow the pilot, entitled "Children Of The Gods." This is a huge commitment by normal US TV standards, so how much is it costing?

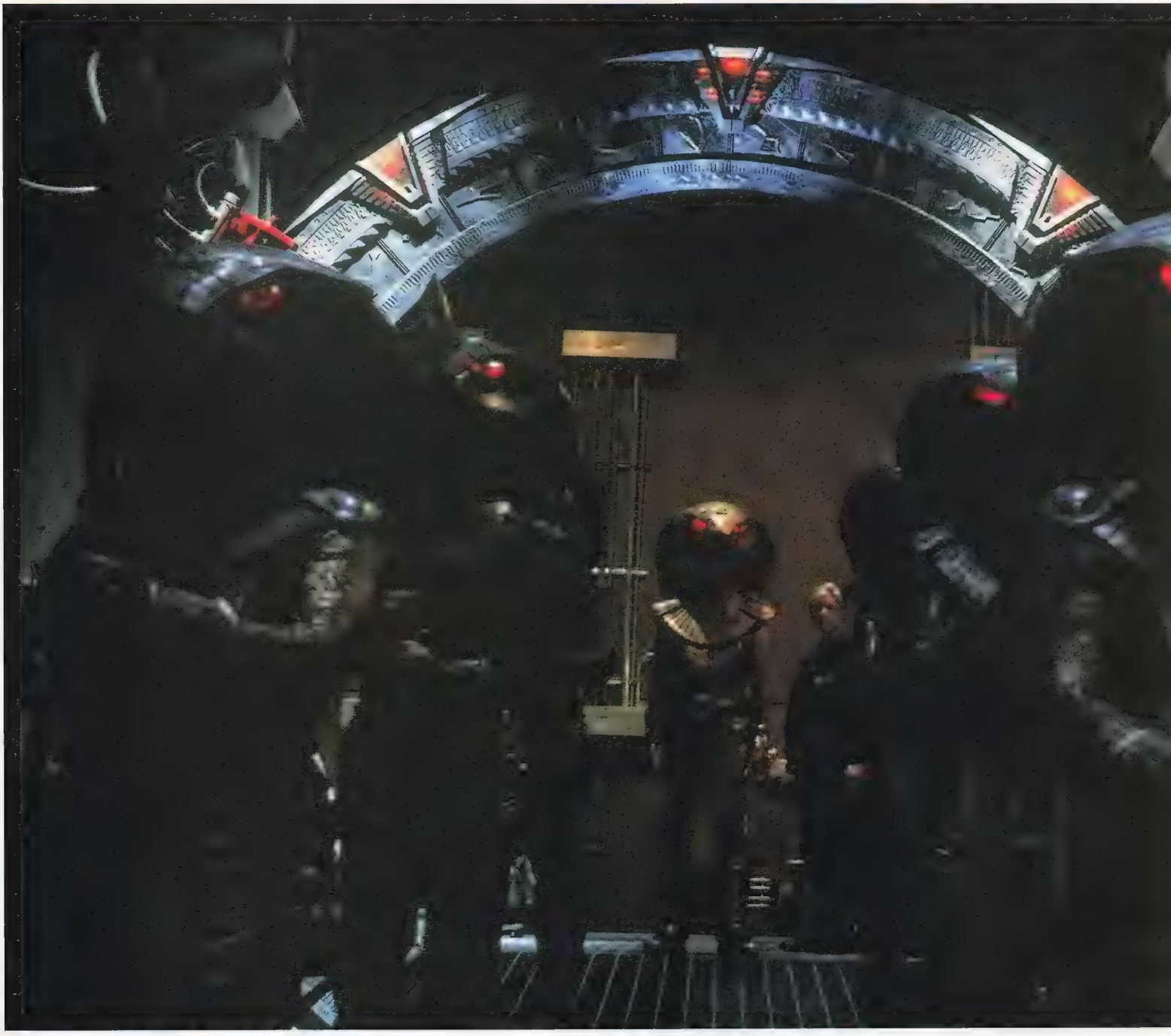
"A lot!" the two producers laugh in unison when **SFX** chatted to them mere weeks before the pilot was due to air in the US on Sunday 27 July.

"Put it this way," Glassner adds with a smile. "I've produced a lot of TV in the past ten years, and this budget is way higher than any I've ever worked on before."

"We don't do anywhere near the amount of effects and CGI that *Babylon 5* does," Wright admits. "But we do have a high ratio of post-production to production time. For the two-hour *Stargate* pilot, we wrapped production in mid-March, and we're still doing the visual effects. We'll finish right under the wire for our delivery date, which is at the end of July. There are over 200 effects shots in it."

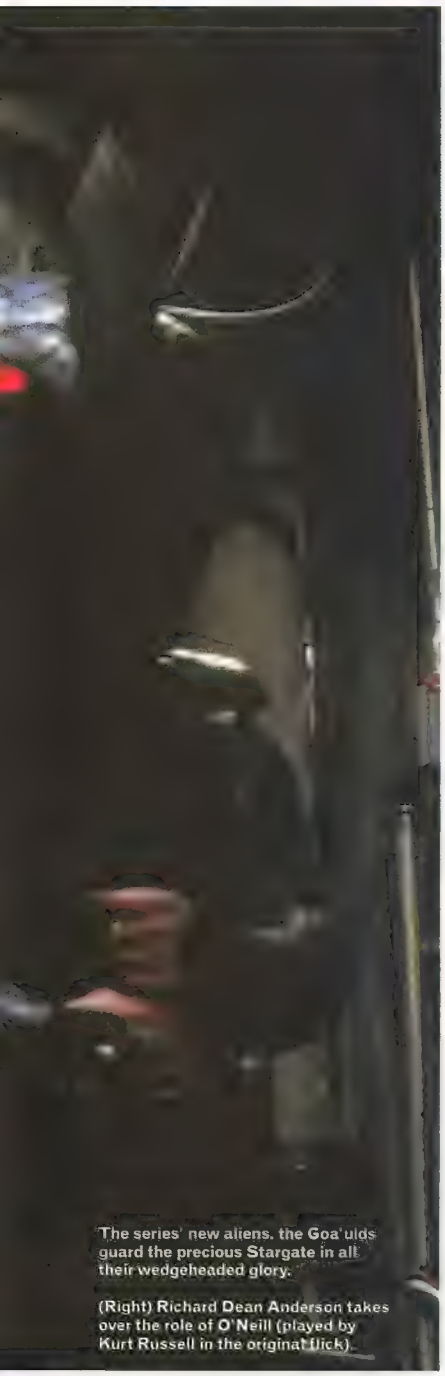
The pilot, penned by Glassner and Wright, picks up with O'Neill (Richard Dean Anderson replacing the movie's Kurt Russell) having completed his mission, although he stops short of closing the gate on the desert planet of Abydos for fear of killing team member Daniel Jackson (played by Michael Shanks in the role originated by James Spader). But when snake-helmed aliens attack through the Stargate on Earth, O'Neill admits to his superiors that he disobeyed orders and that Jackson may, in fact, still be alive. However, O'Neill does not believe the aliens are from Abydos, so a new team is formed and returns to the planet – where they find Jackson alive and well, and married to a native girl. They also discover a map of Stargates throughout the universe, but are not alone in this discovery. Soon, alien attackers intervene, take hostages and are pursued to the primitive planet Chulak (which probably





"We want to build a new mythology about how the Stargate network came to exist." Brad Wright, executive producer

(Left to right) The Goa'ulds prod a reluctant hostage into the Stargate; Jaye Davison may be gone, but campness lives on in *Stargate SG-1;* as the series progresses, the humans learn how to use the Stargates to travel the universe; "And now, hey presto, I shall produce your watch from behind your ear"; Richard Dean Anderson is the star of the series; and here he is with the rest of the regulars; Michael Shanks takes over from the movie's James Spader as scientist Daniel Jackson.



The series' new aliens, the Goa'ulds guard the precious Stargate in all their wedgeheaded glory.

(Right) Richard Dean Anderson takes over the role of O'Neill (played by Kurt Russell in the original flick).

looks somewhat like British Columbia). The struggle is now on.

Both Glassner and Wright admit to being fans of the original movie.

"We liked it a lot," Wright says. "We're fans of science fiction and I've been reading science fiction novels my whole life."

"I'm a little bit less well-read in science fiction," Glassner admits. "I kind of stumbled into the field. I was doing cop shows and dramas for years, and just about every genre you could name, except for comedy. And then I started writing *Alfred Hitchcock Presents,* a genre show but not really SF, and did very well at it. From there, Lorimar put me on a show called *Freddy's Nightmares* – The Freddy Kreuger Show!"

IT'S CLEARLY THE DUO'S hands-on experience in the US television industry which served them in good stead when it came to getting control of *Stargate SG-1*...

"I'm originally from Roanoke, Virginia," explains Glassner. "I studied film and television in college and moved to Hollywood, where I slowly worked my way up the ranks of writing for various television series. I also did a two-hour movie called *Island City.* Then I went on to *The Outer Limits,* and I did that for three years, before working for Trilogy [Trilogy consisting essentially of Pen Densham, Richard B Lewis and John Watson]."

Toronto-born Brad Wright, however, does have an impressive number of SF TV writing credits, having contibuted to shows like *Highlander* and *Forever Knight,* as well as the pilot episode of Showtime's *Poltergeist: The Legacy.* Both men are part of the West Coast scene – west coast of Canada, that is.

"We produce the show up here," Wright explains. "Jonathan and I are executive producers of *Stargate SG-1* and we're both co-executive producers of *The Outer Limits,* but we answer to Trilogy. How we ended up on *Stargate* is kind of a fun story. Doing *The Outer Limits* together, we'd been partners for various projects. We did a couple of shows together that I wrote and he put them together and directed them. It's kind of funny, because we learned that when MGM was planning to go ahead with a *Stargate* series, each of us individually contacted our agents to try to pursue it. Then we found out and decided we should do it together. After that, MGM got involved and basically said, 'Why don't you guys do it?'"

Perhaps the biggest early coup in the series' development was the casting of *MacGuyver's* Richard Dean Anderson in the lead role of Air Force Colonel Jack O'Neill.

"We got lucky!" Glassner says, laughing. "When we started casting, we bounced around who we thought would be ideal. The president of MGM Television happened to be friends with Richard Dean Anderson [he was an executive at Paramount when *MacGuyver* was being produced]. We said, 'Do you think we can get him?' He said, 'Well, let me call.' Well, he called... And here he is!"

Though the supporting regular cast is relatively unknown, Alan Rachins *(LA Law),* Harley Jane Kozak *(Parenthood, Dark Planet)* and Armin Shimmerman *(DS9)* have already shot guest appearances.

Stargate SG-1's pilot also provides a new race of villains (by necessity, since Ra was killed in the movie): parasitic snake creatures called Goa'ulds who use human bodies as hosts to survive (and fie on anyone who says, "Hmm, that cuts down on the make-up effects budget."). But is the series going to be one long battle against these new creatures on the same planet, or do the producers have bigger plans?

"We learn in the pilot that there are many Stargates all around the galaxy," Wright reveals. "There are 39 symbols on the Earth Stargate. Various combinations of those symbols key in other Gates."

So the show will visit other planets, then?

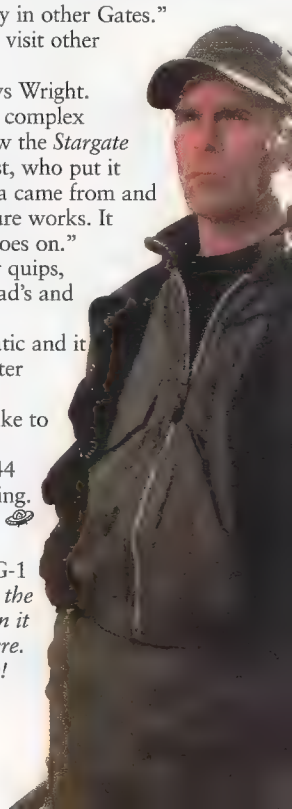
"Absolutely," says Wright. "We want to build a complex mythology about how the *Stargate* network came to exist, who put it there, what species Ra came from and how their whole culture works. It unfolds as the series goes on."

"So far," Glassner quips, "the plotline sits in Brad's and my head!"

"We have a schematic and it keeps growing week after week," Wright adds.

"We'd very much like to go a good long time," Glassner admits. "The 44 could be just the beginning. It's not a limited series."

The series of Stargate SG-1 *is currently showing in the States. No news yet on it being shown over here. Keep an eye on Sky!*



The Film-to-TV Horror Story

FROM THE WORST TO THE BEST OF TV SPIN-OFF SERIES, ADAPTED FOR THE SMALL SCREEN BY DAVE GOLDER.

Beyond Westworld
(1980; original film 1973)
Lou Shaw, the man who created *Quincy,* wrote and produced this shambles in which a mad scientist sends the crazed robots from the movie's pleasure park out into the real world. It lasted a mere five episodes.

Blue Thunder (1984; original film 1982)
Heli-drama mostly memorable for being almost indistinguishable from *Airwolf.*

War Of The Worlds
(1988-90; original film 1953)
Okay, the TV series wasn't inspired b y the movie directly, but it did update and downgrade Welles' classic, and even managed a second season.

Logan's Run
(1977-8; original film 1976)
The TV series didn't have Jenny Agutter. 'Nuff said.

Planet Of The Apes
(1974; original film 1967)
Well, why waste such good costumes?

Highlander
(1992 – ; original film 1986)
One of the most successful syndicated SF series ever. No-one thought it would last, and it's now into its fifth season.

Buffy The Vampire Slayer
(1997–; original film 1992)
An oddity in that the film wasn't a success, but the series, a kind of *Beverly Hills 90210* with blood meets *Sabrina The Teenage Witch,* is going down a storm.

Alien Nation
(1989 –; original film 1988)
So-so movie, excellent series. Fox admit that cancelling the original run was a *big* mistake.

BABYLON 5
Bible
JIM BARKER

THE BABYLON Part Two

PROJECT: WRITING

WITH SEASON FIVE NOW CONFIRMED, AND SEASON FOUR ALREADY BEING AIRED ON CHANNEL 4, **JM STRACZYNSKI** REVEALS TO ANTHONY BROWN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO KEEP HIS EPIC SERIES AFLOAT...

"Nothing phases us here," says JM Straczynski. And you can believe him; there's a calm assuredness in his voice when he's asked whether the doubt over *Babylon 5's* future during season four's production made the show more difficult to write. Or rewrite, if rumours of the series' bible are to be believed. "There's the reality of the way things are, and we deal with it. If you've ever read the old *X-Men* comic books you'll remember the Juggernaut, who just kept on going whatever got in the way of him. That's the way this show is. It's massive, and though they've thrown everything at us, we just keep going."

That juggernaut's been rolling for five years now, and it's almost ten since Straczynski came up with the idea for his revolutionary space saga. After so long, most writers would be developing itchy feet, and looking forward to their next project, but Straczynski's interest in *Babylon 5* remains undimmed. All the same, you can't help wondering, has the series itself lived up to his dreams?

"The reality has equalled or far surpassed what I conceived it to be. Beforehand, there was the anticipation of trying to get it going, and now it's going there's the knowledge that you're doing something which nobody, in this country at least, has ever done before. You wonder how you deal with a five-year storyline and all the structuring and foreshadowing that involves, and there's nobody here to ask. Nobody's ever done this before. You're path-finding through an incredible wilderness, and you can't afford to get too relaxed as there are some large wild animals out there!"

But there are fans too – and they'd argue that Straczynski regularly loses plot, or at least forgets major plotlines, for months at a time. The early parts of the third season, for instance, were dominated by Babylon 5's relations with Earth, yet that antagonistic relationship has hardly been mentioned since. "When you have a story as big as this, you have to break it down into bite-sized chunks or it'll get confusing very quickly," Straczynski explains.

But why, for instance, hasn't Sheridan been worried about his family, and the possibility that his enemies might use them against him in the interim? "It might have occurred to him then, but I wouldn't say it's in any sense against internal logic to leave it for later. If you look at a lot of contemporary horror novels, Stephen King, for example, he'll do a chapter from one character's point of view, and then the next chapter will be from another person's point of view, and then another, and then you eventually come back to the first person.

"When you've got something as massive as the Shadow War it becomes hard to bring up what's happening at home. The first rule of television writing is that if it isn't directly involved with what happens in that episode then it shouldn't be there. So you couldn't stop the show while they're flying off to fight the Shadows so they could discuss what's been happening on Earth. Everything in this show tends to go in waves – we had the Centauri arc, the Minbari arc, the Shadow arc and now we're coming back to the Earth arc."

It's an approach which enables the casual viewer to follow one thread from beginning to end over the course of a few weeks, which is

"EVERYTHING TENDS TO GO IN WAVES – WE HAD THE CENTAURI ARC, THE MINBARI ARC, THE SHADOW ARC... AND NOW WE'RE COMING BACK TO EARTH."

Lyta Alexander got dropped out of the plot in season one, but bounced back later on.

© Jim Barker

"An outline is there as a safety net, like bringing a map into a foreign country. It may not be complete, but there's enough there to let you feel safe if you wander onto a side road."

useful given the way the series currently runs in the States. "Right now," explains Straczynski, "the show is running in bursts of six or nine at a time, once a week, and these batches are separated by seas of re-runs. So you have to structure it so that by episode nine it's a good point to go away for a while and start clean after the re-runs."

And then, of course, there's the fact the series will be run every weekday once it's repeated on the TNT network... "You do have to remember that in two years' time it'll be running every day, and consider how it will play together. You really have to keep both things in your head and keep a foot in both universes. And then there's the part of me that sees it as a novel, and is asking, 'What's the thread of narrative running through this?' And after a while all the voices in your head make you mad."

Which brings us back to the fact that the overall shape of that novel was outlined more than five years ago, and Straczynski had to be pragmatic about what he put into it. There was no point outlining screen-shattering ideas that would have been totally impractical for American TV in 1993. Of course, *B5* stretched the envelope as it evolved, thanks to its experimental CGI effects, large cast and on-going plots, all of which were revolutionary for US TV SF. But now, five years on, everyone else is using them, and there must be a lot of notions, impossible to realise four years ago, which he could realistically achieve today... Doesn't Straczynski feel straitjacketed by his four year old vision? "It's as interesting to me now as when I first started on it," he counters enthusiastically, "and it's partly that the show has been able to change which has helped to keep it fresh. Once I know we can do something, and find that's as far as I went in my original notes, the question becomes 'Where can we go now? What more can we do?' So once we've done an episode where half of it takes place in one room, I wonder whether we can do one where it's *entirely* in one room.

"To me, an outline is there as a safety net, like bringing a map into a foreign country. It may not be complete, but there's enough there to let you feel safe if you wander off onto a side road. You know your way back. You can get lost if you have to, but the security enables you to wander off into all these extraordinary things you'd never have planned, while keeping true to your course. That's always been there as my anchor, and as a level of accomplishment to be aimed for. We've done that, now let's move on to the next level."

Which suggests that the infamous bible isn't as detailed as a lot of fans suppose – it might state what's going to happen, but not necessarily who's going to do it or where it will happen... "Yes. I try to avoid outlining everything to extremes, as once I've done that all the surprises are gone and

Pre-planning has its advantages, but can't cope with everything. Marcus' debut was supposed to be in a comic book series published during season two – but the comic folded.

Londo's arc has taken him from the light and comic to the dark and tragic – but will he make it back again?

writing is just a matter of typing. When I was doing my second novel, *Othersyde,* I initially thought it would be about the policewoman, who was one of the main characters in the story. Instead, it turned out to be about the two kids in the story. The story still went where I wanted it to go, but the lens changed focus from one character to another, and that tends to happen in everything I write. The process is organic. I know where I want to go, but if something comes up *en route,* I'll look at it and if it's better than what I have I'm going to go for it, so long as it doesn't take me too far off track."

You'd imagine it's a lot easier to grasp such opportunities halfway through writing a novel than a TV series. After all, *B5's* early seasons already exist, and have been shown all over the world; it would be a little difficult to go back and change them in the light of later events. However, Straczynski insists this isn't a problem. "I don't tend to rewrite a lot anyway. The only reason to actually rewrite something would be if there was a logical contradiction. If there isn't one, and you're simply finding more interesting characters along the way, then you don't have to do the revisions. I'm very much against rewriting unless you have to, as the more you pick away at it, the more you lose your original voice. In terms of the show there are maybe six or seven points I'd love to go back and twiddle with to bring them into line with the way things are now, but looking back at the whole thing I'm very pleased with the way it hangs together."

One aspect of the plot which has definitely changed is Jeffrey Sinclair's role, which has had major repercussions on *Babylon 5* as a whole. It's not so much how his story ended, as when that end came, and the fact that Sinclair was the only person to travel back with Babylon 4. "Sinclair

EXPERIMENTS IN REAL TIME

Spoiler Alert! JM Straczynski describes the fourth season's innovative climax.

Underneath the Drazi make-up is former Inquisitor Wayne Alexander.

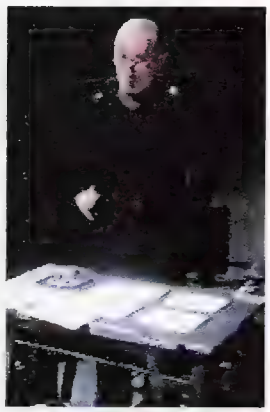
For once, *Babylon 5's* US fans have been left in suspense by the season four cliffhanger. As usual, the last few episodes will be held back for the Autumn, but as the episode originally planned as the season closer has been pulled forward by four episodes, it will actually be the last instalment run before the long Summer break. It's also something of a risky experiment, as JM Straczynski explains.

"Since the first season I've wanted to write an episode where everything takes place in one room, with just a couple of characters. But each time I got close to that, with 'Comes The Inquisitor' and a few others, part of my brain chickened out at the last moment, thinking, 'Oh God, the audience isn't going to sit there for an hour and watch two characters, they're going to go bananas.' So I walked away.

"That happened again in episode 418, 'Intersections In Real Time.' When I wrote it there was a B-story which broke out of that room, but then the episode came in at about eight minutes and 40 seconds too long, and the material which applied to the B story was eight minutes and 50 seconds... And 419 came in at eight minutes short.

"So I took that eight minutes out of 418, popped it into 419, where it fitted perfectly, and now you have what I always wanted: a one room, two-person, real-time story. It's the most powerful thing we've ever done."

But isn't it a bit risky doing that in your season cliff-hanger? "Well the show is about chances. If you don't take chances, what the hell are you here for? To quote Bob Dylan, 'If you're not busy being born, you're busy dying.' You have to keep pushing the envelope, otherwise you might as well find yourself a comely shroud and wrap yourself up, because you're already dead."



Intersections In Real Time isn't actually a two-hander – but it comes damn close.

"THERE ARE MAYBE SIX OR SEVEN POINTS I'D LOVE TO GO BACK AND TWIDDLE, BUT LOOKING BACK AT THE WHOLE THING I'M PLEASED WITH THE WAY IT HANGS TOGETHER."

would have gone back in time to become Valen in any case, but that would have happened later, although not as much as you might think."

But as a result, the pivotal character of Zaphras was stranded 1,000 years in the past as early as the third season, which makes you wonder whether the sudden appearance of his twin brother (also called Zaphras), and the revelation that there are another eight of them in the family, wasn't simply a way of dealing with the fact that the character had to leave with Sinclair, even though he was needed in later episodes. It's a fair cop, it seems. "Zaphras is a rather different matter. I love the character to bits, and consequently I wanted to keep him around, so we could use him in the sequel, and he's useful for production reasons because John Schuck, who plays Draal [the custodian of the Great Machine on Epsilon three, for whom Zaphras works] is on Broadway at the moment in *Hello Dolly*, so he isn't always available, and we've already done one major transformation in Draal's appearance, so I would hesitate to recast him again. The original actor is in New York, anyway."

"So it's nice to have someone else who we've already established down on Epsilon 3. And then the notion occurred to me, well into the story, that if there were ten Zaphras brothers it would be proof the universe is mad. The idea of one is pretty hideous. So I liked that a lot!"

Other problems are easier to smooth over. During the fourth season, for instance, some of the series' regular characters will be meeting familiar faces established back in the first or second seasons, but if the actors who'd played them then weren't available, then there could always have been another face from some unseen past who turned up instead. That the character did appear two years before they became important simply adds verisimilitude to the series as a whole. "That's a case of putting the gun up on the mantle in preparation for firing it. If you see something twice then it's got to be significant, maybe not now, but somewhere down the road."

That's a writer's principle known as Chekhov's Gun, after the Russian playwright who suggested that a gun should be mentioned in the first act if someone is going to fire it later on, and on-line fans have seen the events of "Grey 17 Is Missing" as a reference to this – in the teaser, Garibaldi tells Zack about a gun he inherited from his grandmother, and uses it to kill the Zarg at the episode's end. For once Straczynski's flummoxed, as it seems the reference was purely accidental.

"That wasn't intentional. My subconscious is clearly smarter than I am! Every so often I find an analysis on-line which is actually more accurate than my intention when I wrote the script. Writers tend to reveal pieces of themselves when they write, and sometimes you're aware of that, and sometimes you're not. Somebody comments on

One of the advantages of a five-year arc is the ability to ring the changes, like turning one-time scheming villain G'Kar into a spiritually enlightened and sacrificial character.

Freudian analysts might suggest that Claudia Christian folds her arms across her chest in response to the way JMS turned her teenage experiences into a throwaway joke. Quite what's indicated by the way Bruce Boxleitner is crossing his legs is anyone's guess...

a scene and you think, 'Oh my God, I've just exposed part of myself I didn't mean to...' and you just have to hope no-one else notices."

So which approach does Straczynski feels produces the most meaningful writing? "Both," he replies, but there's a certain vehemence in his voice as he considers certain schools of literary analysis. "The author's intentions are important. There's this deconstructionist notion that the author is the last person to talk to about his work. That's the French school of literary criticism, and only the French would come up with something like that! Apparently the author has no idea what he's writing about, and only the critics can determine the true meaning, which to me is horse-shit!

"The author has a theme he's working towards, a message. There are emotions and a point of view he's trying to communicate, and whether that's overt or covert it's there... Everything else is biography and synchronicity. I know exactly what I'm trying to accomplish with the show, but the truth comes in as self-reflection, and if it reveals things about myself then that's something which helps to inform the characters. Sometimes it's deliberate, sometimes it ain't. There are conversations the characters have had in relationships and I've thought, 'Oh shit, I had that conversation back when I was dating so and so...' But no-one else needs to know that!"

There's no hint of embarrassment in that admission, but it takes two to converse and the other person might not be so relaxed about such "personal" information being reconstituted as TV drama. Isn't there a risk of offending friends – particularly old flames?

"I think everyone has to understand that to a writer everything is grist for the mill. I forget who it was, but someone said he'd push his own grandmother down a flight of stairs to write a poem that would last forever, and then commented that *Ode To A Grecian Urn* is worth any number of old ladies. The writer has to be somewhat cold-blooded, in that you use whatever you have to from your own experience to make the point."

And Straczynski doesn't limit himself to using his own past as inspiration either. "I'm not at all averse to manipulation of my cast. They've all noticed that I've been studying them, but sometimes they'll think that I'm nowhere even near them, only to find I've picked up on something and put it into a script. I'm very in tune with my cast, and sometimes it unnerves them. But that's cool, because it keeps them on their toes. Every so often they'll be uncomfortable about it, but I'll do that in scenes that aren't essential to the story, knowing they'll be true to the performance when they come to that scene."

But do the cast dread such moments, or relish them as an opportunity to really let rip? "Both! When I tap Peter Jurasik or Mira

DIRECTING THE FINAL EPISODE

SPOILER ALERT! THE FINAL EPISODE IS IN THE CAN – AND JMS DIRECTED IT...

By the time *Babylon 5* had safely secured its fifth season last month, the final episode, entitled "Sleeping In Light," was already in the can, where it'll now stay for a year until year five has played itself out.

Which means we'll have to wait another season before we get to see JMS's directorial debut. That's right. After writing more than 50 episodes, he's now stepped behind the cameras to direct.

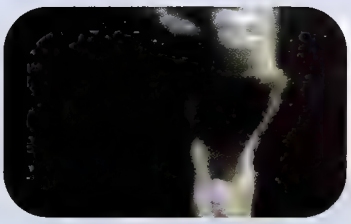
"Everything you see on screen is there shot for shot, line for line, in the script. What I tried to do was create, as closely as possible, what I had in my head when I wrote it, and not to embarrass myself. Well, I blew that second goal almost immediately! On the very first day, my very first shot, they all hit their marks and stood there. Minutes went by, and then someone leant over to me and said, 'You have to say action or they can't move.' I had to pretend I was thinking about the scene!

"But of all the episodes, this one is 100% what I saw in my head. Warners are very happy with the cut, and everyone here has seen it and loved it, saying it's very emotional and very moving."

The last time anyone had such total control over an episode was at the end of *The Prisoner*, when Patrick McGoohan took on an equally wide range of roles to produce a very individual finale. But Straczynski insists there's no comparison between the two.

"They're very different episodes. The whole visual style and structure of 'Fall Out' was very experimental, whereas on 'Sleeping In Light' the direction is pretty conventional. It isn't the sort of story that calls for flashiness. Most of this series is done at a shout. This one's a whisper. So I had to make the directing style unobtrusive, with the focus on what was happening on camera. The fireworks lie in what's happening with the characters, not in a neat camera moves."

So will he be directing more *B5* episodes? "I have no desire to be a director. I think I 'd reach my level of incompetence with breathtaking speed! I did it once in order to become a better writer by learning that side of the work. If I were to do it again the most I'd do would be to do 522, because then I would have completed all the scripts for season five. But I doubt it. If I never direct again, I'll be happy with that."



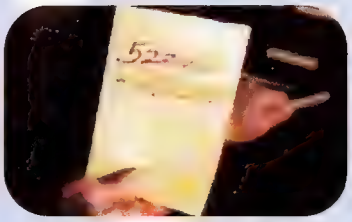
Dark and utterly humourless: *Millennium*.

522666. It spells KABOOM, you know.

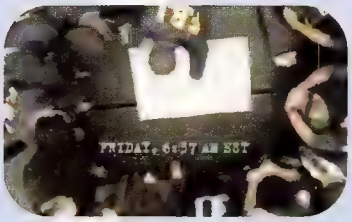
Kaboom! (For real, not on the phone.)

Oh dear. Bad type abounds this night

Frank and pretty wife look concerned.



Mr Black. He writes a lot in notepads.



FBI men stare at a mysterious date.

Er, what's she doing in this?

KABOOM on an American phone pad (you know, the ones with the letters as well as numbers). It also spells LABMON, but, Frank, y'see, can see inside the mind of killers, so he knows that'd be nonsense.

Dave: "This 'psychic cop' thing just means they can spend three-quarters of the episode going 'Oh, no, the killer's getting away,' then when the hour's almost up, Frank can have a psychic flash and finish the story before the last ad break."

Events progress in a murky world of subdued lighting and gritty evil ("a bit like *X-Files*, then."). There's a knock at Dave's front door, during a particular dark bit. Not good for paranoid nerves.

Guy: "Arrghh! It's a serial killer!"

Chris: "Is it the pizza?"

Guy: "Hey look, I'm trying to create a sense of paranoia here."

It's only Cav. We're more disappointed he's not the pizza bloke than relieved he's not a serial killer.

Cav: "What's going on?"

Nick: "That guy has an orgasm every time he blows something up."

Guy: "No, that guy, not me."

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Isn't she just *soooo* beautiful...

Man drowns in large fishtank shock.

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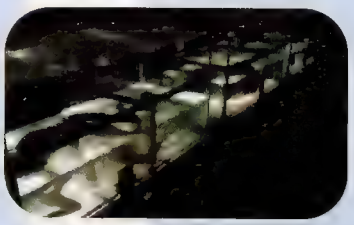

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Couch Potato
THE SFX VIDEO MARATHON

BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID!

PARANOIA NIGHT! MILLENNIUM, THE X-FILES, DARK SKIES, INVADERS... **CHRISTIAN DÜHN** WAS FOOLISH ENOUGH TO ENTER OUR COUCH POTATO COMPO WITH A NEAT IDEA –AND HE WON! GUY HALEY REPORTS...

This time things were not going to be the same. Couch Potato regulars Dave, Lindsay, Cav, Hairy, Nick and Guy were preparing themselves for a sofa session with a difference. For there was an alien in their midst – Christian Dühn, the Great Couch Potato Compo winner from **SFX25**! His prize-winning suggestion? A paranoia night... And paranoia was setting in right from the start...

The crew all shuffled about this visitor nervously, not because – as we suspected – he had programmed the session's photographer's flashing lights to lodge subliminal messages in our brains, but because here was someone from the real world! Could we CENSORED? And what about the CENSORED? Would Hairy be able to CENSORED? And what about Mr Nimoy? We always sing along to his classic CENSORED, but would we come across as too nerdy? No need to fear – Dühn was the first to tug a ring-pull off a can of lager. We breathed a collective sigh of relief, at least we could all get happily CENSORED...

8pm-ish Millennium "522666"

Carter's bleak pre-millennial effort starts out in a "British-style" pub (in Vancouver, we presume). Revellers are everywhere. There's a brusque exchange between a waitress and shady chap, who is quite obviously a serial killer.

Nick: "It looks like an ad for Caffrey's."

The pub is blown up by a nasty killer from across the road. That's the plot: he bombs things for thrills. He uses the code 522666, dialled into a phone, as a taunting message.

The title sequence starts, culminating in the thought for the week: "I am responsible for everything except my very responsibility," J P Sartre. Like, deep, man.

Dave: "Bloody hell. It's just like *The X-Files*. No episode titles."

Chris: "This one's called '522666.'"

Guy: "Why?"

Chris: "That'd be giving away the plot..."

Hairy: "Hmm, but didn't Dave spend the first two years of *The X-Files* wondering why every episode was called 'The Truth Is Out There'?"

Return to the plot. Frank Black is scribbling in his notebook – he works out that 522666 spells out

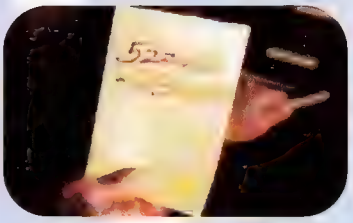
Dark and utterly humourless: *Millennium*.

522666. It spells KABOOM, you know.

Kaboom! (For real, not on the phone.)

Oh dear. Bad type abounds this night

Frank and pretty wife look concerned.



Mr Black. He writes a lot in notepads.

FBI men stare at a mysterious date.

Er, what's she doing in this?

KABOOM on an American phone pad (you know, the ones with the letters as well as numbers). It also spells LABMON, but, Frank, y'see, can see inside the mind of killers, so he knows that'd be nonsense.

Dave: "This 'psychic cop' thing just means they can spend three-quarters of the episode going 'Oh, no, the killer's getting away,' then when the hour's almost up, Frank can have a psychic flash and finish the story before the last ad break."

Events progress in a murky world of subdued lighting and gritty evil ("a bit like *X-Files*, then."). There's a knock at Dave's front door, during a particular dark bit. Not good for paranoid nerves.

Guy: "Arrghh! It's a serial killer!"

Chris: "Is it the pizza?"

Guy: "Hey look, I'm trying to create a sense of paranoia here."

It's only Cav. We're more disappointed he's not the pizza bloke than relieved he's not a serial killer.

Cav: "What's going on?"

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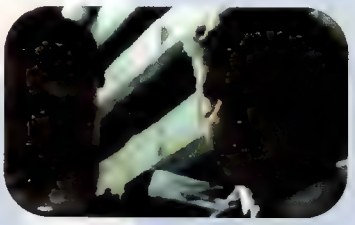

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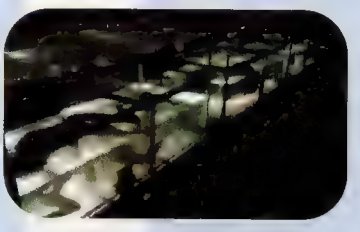
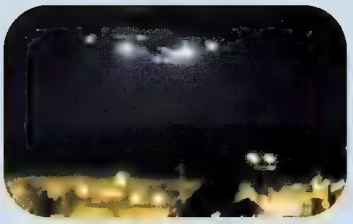


The latest British Olympic training: poor

Toothpick? Hah! I'm that hard me...

Go on! Kiss it! Kiss it! You know you want it!

Megan's bum. Gillian's was too big.


Roswell! Again. And again... And again...

Guest Of The Month

My experience of the Couch Potato Experiment; from the files of Dr Christian von Doom.

Perhaps Leonard Nimoy's "classic" *Bilbo Baggins* is not what you'd expect to hear after a night of serious paranoia, yet just after midnight on SFX's Paranoia Night Couch Potato, the SFX editor's "mansion" was shaken to its foundation by this infamous tune. The idea of myself and the test subjects singing along might not indicate a high state of paranoia. Or did it? Perhaps my plan worked. Possibly, the dark worlds of *The X-Files et al.* got to us all so much that our only cure was to enter the cheerful world of Bilbo. Or, more likely, their behaviour was a direct result of imbibing vast quantities of alcohol (intended to soften them up; it didn't work).

However, before this pathetic display, what I found most interesting was how the conversation drifted off at increasingly inane tangents. While watching "The Erlenmeyer Flask," for instance, the topic of debate was not the fifth and sixth, probably extra-terrestrial, DNA nucleotides discovered by Scully, but the personalities and backgrounds of Dr Berube's monkeys... Another recurring subject of discussion was who was the better looking, Gillian Anderson or Megan Ward. I have to say I concur with subject Golder#1... Verdict? The crew are too weird to be paranormal... Case closed.

Dave: *(Trying to change the subject)* "Um, he was in *Trek*, wasn't he?"
Nick: *(Taking the bait)* "I take it you mean Deep Throat? Yep, he was Mark Twain in 'Time's Arrow.'"
Guy: "And he was in that episode where they were kidnapping kids."
Cav: "I don't care. I want to watch the *Demolitionist* again from that straight-to-video sesh we did [**SFX21**]. The woman in that was great! Not like Ms 'lardy' Anderson. She's fat!"

Gosh! Real drama threatens to erupt as Dave turns a strange shade of red.
Dave: "She's preggers, not fat."
Cav: "That wasn't until the second season. You remember, when they had to shoot her from the double-chin up."
Dave: "Leave off. She's lovely. "
Cav: "Lardy arse. Let's fast forward to Megan Ward. Now there's a *real* woman."
Guy: *(Intervening)* "Hey! Agent Skinner! He's a great chap!"

Skinner goes into a lab, where scientists are experimenting on monkeys and humans. Dr Berube's name prompts everyone to sing Hanson's hit record. Hardly paranoia-inducing.
Nick: "Those caged monkeys look agitated."
Guy: "The scientists are sticking big needles up their arses. That'd make anyone agitated."
Cav: "Except one – look, he's at the back, smiling. Bet he's called Julian."

Rough treatment of the simians leads to a bout of childish but amusing "beating the monkey" jokes (ask an American).

By now, we're a bit lost, so Hairy attempts to explain the plot. However, saying "Deep Throat" next to Cav is not a good idea...
Cav: "Deep throat! What a name... 'Hi, I'm Deep Throat.'"

The inevitable porno references ensue. This is what happens when you get an all-male Couch Potato...

Meanwhile, Mulder has got into a warehouse behind the lab. It's full of people in tanks. Not the military variety, of course.
Cav: "I bet this is where they grew Hanson. That one looks like a woman. A very short woman. Must be Gillian Anderson..."
Dave: "Oi!"

Cavan, disillusioned with *The X-Files*, starts rifling through Dave's video collection...
Cav: "Look, this one's got Brian Blessed in it!"
Dave: "How come every Couch Potato gets round to mentioning Brian Blessed?"
Cav: "Because I always pull out this video and say "Brian Blessed's in this one." He's large , you know. Almost as large as Gillian Anderson..."
Dave: "Oi, Cav!"

Deafening impressions of Brian Blessed go off randomly around the room like firecrackers. By the time it's over the plot has escaped...
Guy: "What the hell's going on?"
Dave: "You're not supposed to know; you're supposed to be paranoid."

Mulder, out of the warehouse now, is poking about in an attic where he has a brief meeting with the man from the docks, an alien transgenic experiment subject, who's escaped from the laboratory.
Guy: "Why do they always have these bits taking place in attics?"
Dave: "I'd live in an attic if I thought Gillian Anderson was going to turn up."

The action moves outdoors...
Guy: "Somewhere outdoors in Vancouver..."
Cav: "Look, look! There's Paul McGann on a motorbike!"
Hairy: "Soon we're going to get the alien-on-a-stick scene."
Cav: "You better hope Gillian Anderson doesn't scoff it. She's already got a lardy arse!"
Dave: "I hate you."

Scully discovers a frozen alien embryo (and, much to Cav's amusement, looks as if she's going to lick it like an ice lolly), then Deep Throat gets shot on a freeway outside Vancouver… Sorry, Boston.
Nick: *(Affecting a not even remotely passable Alec Guinness accent)* "There is another!"

Any excuse for Cav to trot out his Darth Vader impression...
Cav: "Sister! You have a twin sister."

Paranoia is at an all-time low. Julian the Monkey jokes are more in vogue. When asked whether he's nervous, Cav just says: "I'm not, but every pie shop in the country is shaking."

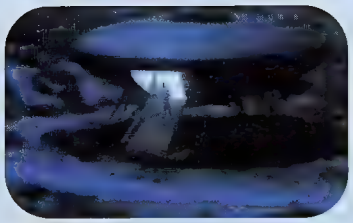
We put the next video on before Dave can kill him.

9.30pm Dark Skies "Hostile Convergence"

On-screen captions give us the date, place and time of this specially chosen episode, which – shock, horror! – starts with a man watching a UFO land in the desert.
Cav: "Are we going to watch a single episode tonight which doesn't have captions in a bad typewriter font?"
Dave: "Cav's moving closer to the screen. He's trying to get as close as possible to Megan!"
Cav: "I think she's great."
Dave: "D'you reckon that if we had a whip-round this evening we'd have enough cash for a new series?"
Guy: "All we'd need is a few quid for a couple of planks of wood..."
Cav: "Grrrr!"

A man is in prison. After being questioned, he is given a dinner tray, most of which is taken up by a huge hotdog.
Guy: "Julian'd ask for seconds."
Hairy: "I'll bet that sausage is big enough to get an alien in it..."

Sure enough, a Hive alien leaps into the chap's gob. Grisly choking and gagging noises



UFOs: The Galactic Fridge Company?

Yet more curves for the crew to lust over...

Quick! The man with the yo-yo's coming!

Shoot Invaders and they glow red. Yay!

ensue as the malodorous squid thing squirms its way down his throat.
Cav: "That's one hell of a case of BSE."

As this is the episode where Megan gets annoyed with square-jawed Loengard and goes home to her sister's rigged wedding, there's rather a lot of her in it, much to Cav's delight...
Dave: "Oh, come on, she looks like she's 90!"
Cav: "You can't knock me. I'm not insecure about Megan like you are about porky Gillian."
Guy: "I think she and Dave would make a lovely couple."

Cut back to chap in jail. Possessed, he's jumping around the screen, frothing.
Hairy: "Look at him. He's *maaaaad!*"
Guy: "Do you want to see my weasel?"
Hairy: "Wasn't he in *Coach?*"
Lindsay: "What the hell's *Coach?*"

Cut back to Loengard, who is talking to one of his journalist contacts. Suddenly, the screen is full of flak and tracer fire as an alien saucer is blown out of the sky.
Nick: "It's the Roswell crash!"
Chris: "That shot's in every episode. Every time they mention Roswell they're compelled to show it."
Cav: "It's like the hippo in *Reginald Perrin.* Except a bit more expensive."
Guy: "You can see where the budget for the entire series went, then."

This results in people yelling "Roswell" at intermittent intervals for the rest of the evening, jumping up and pointing at the sky.

Meanwhile, Megan's sister's getting married to a member of Majestic – the shady government organisation which investigates the alien menace and is on Loengard's trail. Is the groom just marrying Meg's sis to get at Loengard or does he really love her?
Cav: "Frankly, I think he'd be better off with Julian the Monkey."
Nick: "She goes bad later in the season anyway, so it doesn't matter."

Cav produces a sound unheard of since Syd James did his last *Carry On* movie.
Nick: "It's a shame it's been axed. The idea to set each season in a separate decade was neat."
Cav: "You knew Loengard was going to survive though, because he did the opening voice-overs from the future."
Guy: "Aren't there rumours of TV movies?"
Dave: "Yeah, but that's all they are. Looks like they've fallen through as well."

And then, for some reason, it's back to Julian the Monkey jokes, most of which are a) too filthy and b) too politically incorrect to be published in anything this side of the Bernard Manning 1998 annual. The evening was getting sillier, although we manage to discuss the paranoia effect of *Dark Skies*. That is, when we're not giggling...
Nick: "I'm a massive fan of *Dark Skies,* but that wasn't too good."

Unfortunately, it seems that our guest is falling foul of his own plan...

"Grisly choking noises ensue as the malodorous squid thing forces its way down his throat."

Chris: "What do you mean, am I paranoid? Who do you answer to? You're one of them!"
Hairy: "I thought that was largely shash. It just smacks of everything else."
Lindsay: "Utter knob. Not paranoid at all."

10.25pm The Invaders "The Believers"

And finally to that classic alien infiltration show from the '60s and forebear of *Dark Skies.* Unfortunately, cheap Bulgarian wine leads to it being very loosely followed by the crew indeed.
Dave: "At least it's not written by Morgan and Wong."

The voice-over tells us only David Vincent knows the aliens are here...
Hairy: "Only he knows? What about Mulder and Scully and Loengard and Captain Scarlet and that bloke in the high street with the bottle of Thunderbird..."
Dave: "Voice-over instead of captions, eh? American producers were obviously worried about literacy in the US in those days."
Cav: "It's a not a 'Quinn Martin Production,' is it? You know, the lot who did *(puts on deep voice-over voice) The Streets Of San Francisco."*

A second later, the voice-over informs us that it is indeed a Quinn Martin Production.
Guy: "So the aliens have got stiff little fingers?"
Nick: "That's how you spot them – ask 'em to drink a cup of tea."
Dave: "That's where the punk group got their name from."
Hairy: "Why is everything grey?"

As far as we can gather over Julian the Monkey impressions, David Vincent is running away from the bad guys. It's something which, Dave informs us, happens a lot in this series. A man chases Vincent plus orange-dressed ladyfriend out of a glass-fronted building which probably looked futuristic in the '60s ("And "wouldn't look out of place in *BUGS*" – Cav). He opens his hand to reveal a strange object...
Guy: "He's got a yo-yo! Run!"
Hairy and Cav: "And he's not afraid to use it!"

The two heroes enter a study where they talk about the aliens. The lass is big-eyed and vulnerable, and in her little orange dress, predictably, fancied by everyone.
Cav: "Does she ever wear anything apart from that orange dress?"
Guy: *(Predictably)* "Time to take it off then!"

Suddenly, the heroes' little *tête-à-tête* is interrupted as aliens surround the house.
Nick: "If you don't come out, we'll sing Europe's *Final Countdown!"*

Air-guitars are played vigorously while eight not-drunk-at-all-honest-guv people strangle a light metal classic. Things degenerate into a wine-sodden blur of gags and a shouting match between Dave and Cav about Gillian Anderson's motherly figure...
Nick: "Oi! I'm trying to watch this."

Cav looks around briefly for something to throw at Dave.
Cav: "Oh, it's ended."
Dave: "Top slice of '60s kitsch. Shame it was the same plot every week."
Guy: "Ah, so it truly was a predecessor of *The X-Files* then."
Hairy: "Anyway, that girl..."

The theme-music is drowned out by appreciation for said lady, despite the fact that she's probably drawing her pension by now. Dave foolishly brings Gillian into the conversation, Cav retorts with an insult, and the next thing we know, the two of them are fighting a duel for the fair maidens' (or carrot-topped and brunette maidens') honour, using a pencil and a half-eaten garlic baguette. It's a victory for the loaf.
Nick: "I could be wrong, but I don't think anybody's really paranoid."
Hairy: "No? Christian's terrified."
Chris: "Yeah – of you lot!"

The new series of Millennium *starts on Sky One in January. Season four of* The X-Files *returns to BBC in the Autumn.* Dark Skies *has been cancelled, while* The Invaders *is currently being repeated on The Sci-Fi Channel (and Christian is undergoing intensive psychiatric treatment).*

COMING SOON IN

TOTAL FILM

IT'S DARK

(AND THEY'RE WEARING SUNGLASSES)

Aliens.
Rocket cars.
Flying saucers.
Giant guns. Robots.
Secret government agencies.
Memory erasers. Black suits.
Big boots. And Raybans.
Next issue, we meet the
Men In Black.

PLUS!

Contact, *Spawn*, Sandra Bullock gets wet in *Speed 2*, we meet *M*A*S*H*/*The Player* film god Robert Altman, and Rowan Atkinson pulls a funny face in the "eagerly awaited" *Bean* (the movie).

It's all in Total Film 8. On sale Wednesday 30 July.

Danny DeVito directs and stars in the typically black Roald Dahl tale *Matilda*. See page 95...

REVIEWS

Men In Black... Poltergeist: The Legacy... Mars Attacks!... Earthquake Weather...

Dark Characters

They are the Men In Black – but they're not the only ones who've spotted the potential of a light-absorbing outfit. Here's our dozen shadowy characters, including one girlie who's as vicious as any man...

- **Death** – Who else for the top slot but Discworld's finest?
- **Darth Vader** – He really polished that helmet.
- **The Master** – Started out in a stylish Nehru jacket; ended up drezzing for the occasion!
- **Tommy Lee Jones** – From FBI to MIB, he gets the dark suits.
- **Mr Bester** – The Psi-Corp got the idea first, Men In Black.
- **Kerr Avon** – Well now. A smile, a gun and black leather suit.
- **Rutger Hauer** – Did anyone actually understand those Guinness adverts?
- **Servalan** – An honorary tip of the hat to the galaxy's queen.
- **Malcolm McDowell** – It was a good performance the first time.
- **Black Bolt** – Dud costume, and he never gets to speak!
- **Spider-Man** – They gave him a crap black outfit in the '70s.
- **The Stormtroopers** – Baddies should dress in black, not white!

FILM Reviews **PAGE 84**

They are the Men In Black, and they're your last defence against a Summer of trashy blockbusters. Just hope they use their Neuralizers to wipe your memories of *Batman And Robin!*

TV Reviews **PAGE 86**

Poltergeist: The Legacy curses Channel 5 to terrible reception, the *Space Cadets* attack Channel 4, and Dot Matrix *ReBoots* her digital *café* for a fresh run on Children's ITV...

VIDEO Reviews **PAGE 90**

Mars Attacks! your video recorder, *Dracula: Dead And Loving It* proves you can't kill a film with bad reviews, and *Disney Shrink The Franchise* for the straight-to-video small screen. Plus, a *V* tape that's good, and the Borg's encounter with Voyager...

BOOK Reviews **PAGE 96**

Stephen Baxter launches his latest space-shot, David Bowker chronicles an unconventional detective, and **SFX**'s own Mark Morris presents a double-bill of horror.

COMIC Reviews **PAGE 102**

The man in blue and red gets all mixed up in *The Superman Madman Hullabaloo*, plus Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* and an outstanding *Gen 13*.

NEW MEDIA Reviews **PAGE 104**

Superlative 3D monster bash *Turok* on the N64, plus LucasArts' *Dark Forces* finally reaches the PlayStation.

TOSH Reviews **PAGE 106**

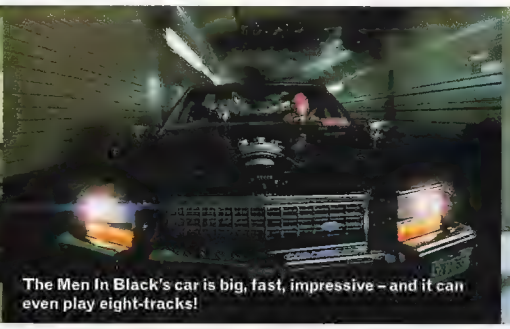
Tarzan's gone to Mars courtesy of a new range of action figures mixing Edgar Rice Burroughs' greatest creations. Plus, a Romulan Bird Of Prey that needs a paint job, a Darth Vader helmet that lets you walk around town without showing your face, and a hi-tech pencil from *Captain Star...*

***ReBoot* season three continues to push the series on. See page 88...**

FILM Reviews

"Without doubt, the funniest science fiction film ever made."

Thankfully, the Will Smith-Linda Fiorentino romance is played strictly for laughs.



The Men In Black's car is big, fast, impressive – and it can even play eight-tracks!

Which of these young men would you pick for *your* top secret organisation?

MEN IN BLACK

Expect to see a lot of people dressed in smart, black suits and Ray-Bans at SF conventions over the next few months. Whether they'll be able to replicate the enormous guns remains to be seen...

Distributor: **Columbia**
Director: **Barry Sonnenfeld**
Starring: **Tommy Lee Jones, Will Smith, Linda Fiorentino, Vincent D'Onofrio, Rip Torn, Tony Shalhoub**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Now showing**
Running time: **90 mins**

Reviewer: **Jon Courtenay Grimwood**

This is, without doubt, the funniest SF film ever made... What else is there to say about *Men In Black*? Imagine a hallucinogenic version of *Man From UNCLE*, with stony-faced Tommy Lee Jones as Napoleon Solo and Will Smith as Illya Kuryakin, and you've got some idea of the tone.

The Men in Black themselves are the best kept secret in the universe. They are – as they state loudly and often – our best, last and only line of defence when close encounters get ugly. Yep, they're officials of Earth's immigration service and regulators of all things alien on this planet. In fact, their job is so secret, not even the US government

knows they exist, although the world has felt their influence in many ways – for instance, their vast retro-'60s Manhattan-based organisation was funded by marketing the weirder bits of alien technology, like liposuction!

The opening computer generated sequence shows what could be a bizarre alien spacecraft, or perhaps a mechanical dragonfly, skimming low through the night sky – before it unceremoniously gets splattered on the windscreen of a truck. Not any old truck, you understand, but one stuffed full of illegal aliens from Mexico trying to get over the US border in search of work. Only, one of them isn't just a bog-standard, border-hopping illegal alien; he's an alien illegal alien.

Which is when agent Kay turns up and mind-wipes the state troopers who've stopped the truck, feeding them some junk story about marsh gas, Venus and weather balloons. (You think the Roswell cover story could have been thought up by someone who wasn't in a hell of a hurry?)

Then it's back to New York, where super-fit NYPD cop James Edwards (Will Smith) runs down an alien only to have the creature commit suicide rather than be taken back alive. Cue mind-wipe for James, and an invitation to try out for the agency...

Will Smith manages to be both streetwise and *naïve* as agent Jay; Tommy Lee Jones turns in his best performance since God knows when as the world-weary agent Kay, and Linda Fiorentino is perfect as the Scully-like Dr Laurel Weaver. Indeed, she only has to inadvertently stumble over an alien corpse for agents Kay and Jay to treat her to a quick mind-wipe...

The script is a killer too, filled with a succession of rapid sight gags. Sly Stallone's pic in a list of registered aliens, coffee-crazed extra-terrestrials, a state-of-the-art car that puts the Batmobile to shame but still has an eight-track stereo... Ed Solomon's script is so quick-fire that a mere two minutes of random dialogue has more decent jokes in it than *Batman And Robin* and *Batman Forever* put together (not hard, we know).

(Above) Vincent D'Onofrio before he has his skin removed by a giant bug. His performance in the rest of the movie as bug-disguised-in-D'Onofrio's skin is superb.

Men In Black lifts the best bits of everything from '50s B-movies and '60s design to '90s cult TV without once looking derivative. Industrial Light And Magic's special visual effects are first class, while the blending of CGI, brilliant alien puppets (courtesy of Rick *(Gremlins)* Baker), and live action is, in the main, extremely impressive.

Mix in a complex plot about assassinated royal aliens, a missing galaxy and an intergalactic peace-keeping force not afraid to wipe out Earth if that's what it takes to stop a bug alien – a psychotic cockroach with a serious inferiority complex – and you've got an instant classic.

The audience at the preview screening cheered this film to the rafters when the lights finally went up (and we're talking cynical, acid-swilling, hardened hacks here). Then everyone piled out of the cinema still arguing over which was the best scene. Believe me, *The Fifth Element* might be good but *Men In Black* is this year's big one... 🎬

"Let's hope they don't balls it up. Until they do, watch it..."

POLTERGEIST

Production company: **Showtime**
Producer: **N John Smith**
Starring: **Derek De Lint, Robbi Chong, Martin Cummins, Patrick Fitzgerald, Helen Shaver**
Showing: **Channel 5, Tuesdays, 9pm**

Reviewer: **Gwidon Poleczko**

THE LEG

***Poltergeist: The Legacy* has nothing whatsoever to do with *Poltergeist: The Vastly Over-Extended Film Series.* Which is a great thing really since the films did that limited idea to death (and beyond). And while the *Poltergeist* banner will undoubtedly draw in otherwise uninterested viewers, *Legacy* is definitely good enough to stand on its own as a way above-average slice of horror TV.**

The Legacy of the title is the supernatural equivalent to UNIT or UNCLE – a hi-tech, international organisation dedicated to protecting mankind from the forces of evil. It's been doing a sterling job of this for 3,000 years, fighting demons, magical artefacts and ancient and horrible chthonic things lodged deep in the bowels of the Earth. Basically, your usual occult nastiness...

The San Francisco branch is run by a certain Dr Derek Rayne (Derek De Lint), who starts the pilot as a bolshy teenager who can't be bothered to do his Latin homework. When his father is killed working for The Legacy he bucks his ideas up and devotes his life to fighting evil. He's aided in this task by four others: the brash Nick Boyle (Martin Cummins), a helicopter pilot; Father Philip Connelly (Patrick Fitzgerald), a reluctant priest; Alex Moreau, a social worker (Robbi Chong) and Dr Rachel Corrigan (Helen Shaver), a mother and psychiatrist who's drafted in to replace a team member slain in the first episode.

It's classic horror stuff right from the word go with fallen angels and spirits popping up all over the place. None of this "But it could be put down to mass hysteria, Mulder," rubbish. They accept the occult and get on with it. The plots are pacy and full of energy, having been inspired by mythology, like the Lithuanian demon in "The Tenement" and the Ka (no, not a Ford automobile – it's an Egyptian soul), separated from its mummified body, in "Doppelganger"; and classic literature, as in "The

Substitute," which was inspired by Theodore Dreiser's "The Hand."

Thankfully, the characterisation keeps on the right side of clichéd, all the Legacy members harbour some dark, yet ultimately human, secret. More importantly, they behave like real people, and you care what happens to them, which is more than can be said about the bland do-gooders in *Star Trek*. I mean, Dr Rayne is a nasty egotist, but he's great that way, and the troubled priest behaves like a man of the cloth would, meandering back and forth between his parish commitments and work for The Legacy, although a suspiciously heavy proportion of the baddies sport English accents...

Thankfully, the bits set in Ireland look like they were shot in Ireland (rather than Vancouver) and there are a number of appearances by veteran guest stars *(MASH's* David Ogden Stiers, for instance). In addition, the production values are high, which means the show doesn't just catch your attention; it's absorbing and genuinely creepy. And despite having on-going character development, there's no arc, which mean the writers get more opportunity to play around. (More importantly, it means you can harmlessly miss a few episodes for a few pints down the local.)

Other things to look out for are subplots which pitch one of the team into other, unconnected, investigations (why should all the team members be investigating the same thing?) and the superb special effects.

As it stands, *Poltergeist: The Legacy* is shaping up nicely. It's certainly great to see a good horror series on TV as an alternative to the usual SF fare. Let's just hope they don't balls it all up. Until they do, watch it.

A-

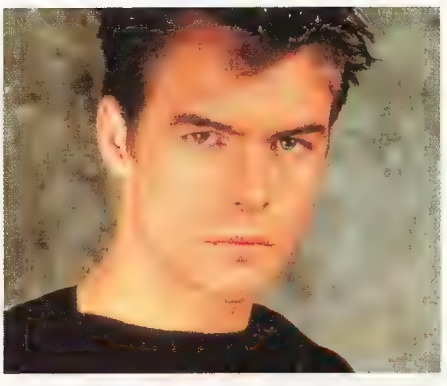
An alternative title for the pilot episode of *Poltergeist: The Legacy* was rumoured to be "The Magic Money Box Of Doom."

Patrick Fitzgerald is the unworthy priest. It must make a change from those Caffrey's adverts...

Helen Shaver is the attractive mommy, but has a hilariously grim scene in the pilot.

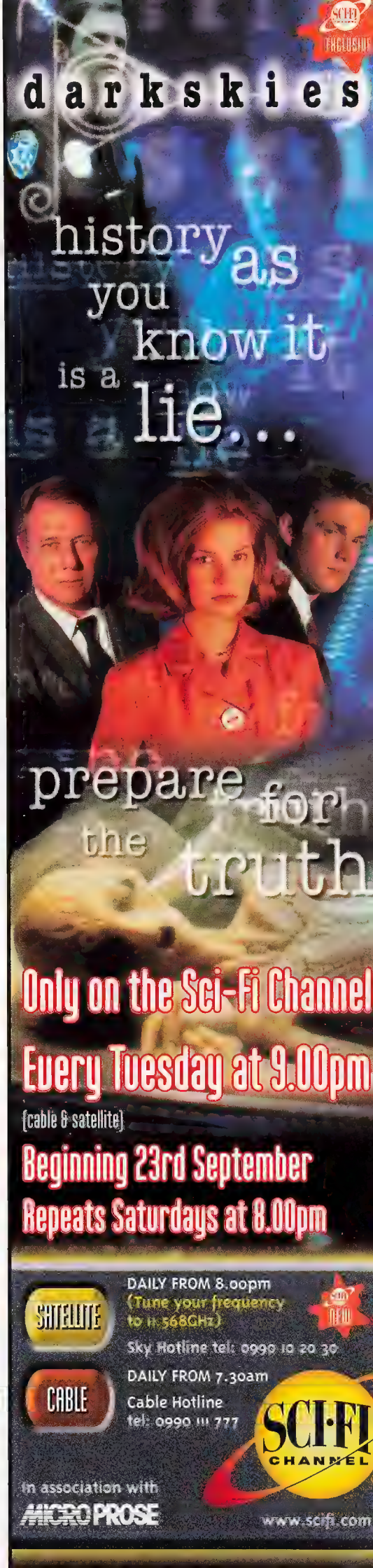
Derek de Lint as Dr Derek Rayne. He's inexplicably Dutch.

Robbi Chong... Her character is both sexy and sassy.



Martin Cummins. He's a chopper pilot, you know.

ACY



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The month in TV

AN SF QUIZ SHOW THAT'S A LITTLE UNSURE OF ITSELF, PLUS REBOOT ENTERS ITS THIRD SEASON...

SPACE CADETS

Wark Clemens Productions

Producer: **Alan Clemens**
Starring: **Greg Proops, Craig Charles, Bill Bailey**
Showing: **Channel 4, Tuesdays, 6pm; repeated Wednesdays, 10.10pm**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

An SF version of *Have I Got News for You?* Well, it was going to happen one day; it's just a little surprising to find it on Channel 4 rather than the Sci-Fi Channel. SF has clearly reached the mainstream, or at least as close as C4 ever gets...

Exactly how mainstream science fiction is seems to be one of those questions which has *Space Cadets* in two minds. On the one hand, it relies a lot on *Whose Line is It Anyway?*-style gags about ropey old B-movies; on the other hand it includes quips which expect you to know the names of the computers Captain Kirk destroyed. The producers seem similarly uncertain how seriously to take the quiz, filling the bulk of the panel with comedians and SF stars whose knowledge of the subject is probably pretty minimal.

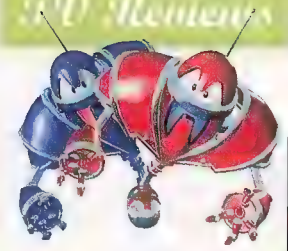
But then there's Kim Newman. I can recall an edition of *The News Quiz* where Pamela Armstrong missed the point and insisted on dashing in with the right answer straight away. Her team won by a mile, but it rather spoilt the fun... You do have to wonder whether it's a good idea to have an SF-knowledgeable person on one side, and not the other. It rather gets in the way of the comedy, and doesn't exactly make for an exciting, evenly matched contest either.

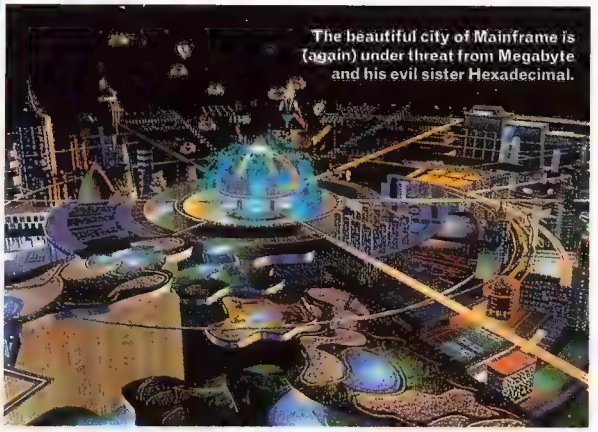
But then that shouldn't be the point. *Space Cadets* was never likely to bear comparison to *Have I Got News for You.* Topical jokes about the Voyager's latest holo-deck malfunctions aren't exactly on the agenda, and President Clark is unlikely to join the panel however many brown envelopes you offer him – but it provides a fair share of laughs along the way, if only at the expense of Shatner's ever-expanding waistline and ego. It might provide a few more if it weren't for the pauses inviting laughter – Greg Proops could take a few hints from Angus Deayton's deadpan chairmanship. It would also help if the chairman's script was a little less strained – the running joke about the computer's name ran out of steam before the first ad break, but looks disturbingly likely to carry on throughout the series.

Is it funny? Yes, if not as much as you'd have hoped. Does it patronise SF fans? Again, yes, but not nearly as much as you might have feared. And is it worth seeing? Well, paired with *B5,* it's unmissable!

C+

Joining the Charles, Bailey, and Proops trio are William Shatner (left) and Claudia Christian (above).





The beautiful city of Mainframe is (again) under threat from Megabyte and his evil sister Hexadecimal.

Better CGI and tougher storylines mark out *ReBoot's* season three.

REBOOT

MainFrame (for Meridian)

Executive creative consultant: **Ian Pearson**
Starring: **CGI fellas**
Showing: **ITV, Thursdays, 4.40pm**
Reviewer: **Guy Haley**

Enzo, AndrAla, Phong, Megabyte, they're all back for a third crack of the TV whip. Fans will be delighted, and if you haven't seen the computer-generated *ReBoot* yet then WHY? Don't you know good stuff when it's wasted on a kid's TV slot?

To rip off the catchphrase of MJ "Simo" Simpson, *ReBoot* is Quite Possibly The Best Cartoon Ever Made. It has thrills, spills, sexy sprites, a murderous, evil megalomaniac and a crazy bondage queen as baddies, a story arc and a cast more believable than the distilled essence of every character from the last 20 Hollywood blockbusters. I really can't bang on about how good this is. Even when it's cute, it's cleverly cute.

Here's a quick rundown of the plot. *ReBoot* is set in a city called MainFrame, situated deep inside some chap's computer (referred to as "the user"). Governed by the kindly Phong, Mainframe's citizens live in constant fear of the Game Cube, which descends when the user wants to play a game. Unfortunately, this means deletion to those binomes roped in to be game characters if the user wins... So they have a guardian, Bob, to protect them...

Shattering this idyll is the virus Megabyte, who, with his evil sister Hexadecimal, plans to turn Mainframe into Megaframe, and in this, the third series, he seems all set to achieve his goals, with guardian Bob permanently exiled and Phong incarcerated.

Exciting stuff, but the third season breaks even more boundaries, with the CGI assuming a new level of realism, and obligatory kids Enzo and AndrAla having to grow up fast (literally and figuratively) to cope with the extra responsibility put upon them.

But despite its overwhelming excellence, there is one sorry drawback: It's on Children's ITV when most of us are still at work/school/the outpatient's clinic. But, hey, that's what they invented video recorders for. Set it now.

A-

SF TV Top Ten

Family SF

Mainstream drama rules!

SF TV Top Ten

1. **Bliss (ITV)**
2. **Wokenwell (ITV)**
3. **Police 2020 (ITV)**
4. **Star Trek: The Next Generation (Sky One/BBC 2)**
5. **The X-Files (Sky One BBC 1)**
6. **Millennium (ITV)**
7. **The Outer Limits (BBC 2)**
8. **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (Sky One/ BBC2)**
9. **Star Trek: Voyager (Sky One/BBC2)**
10. **Hercules (Sky One/ Two/Channel 5)**

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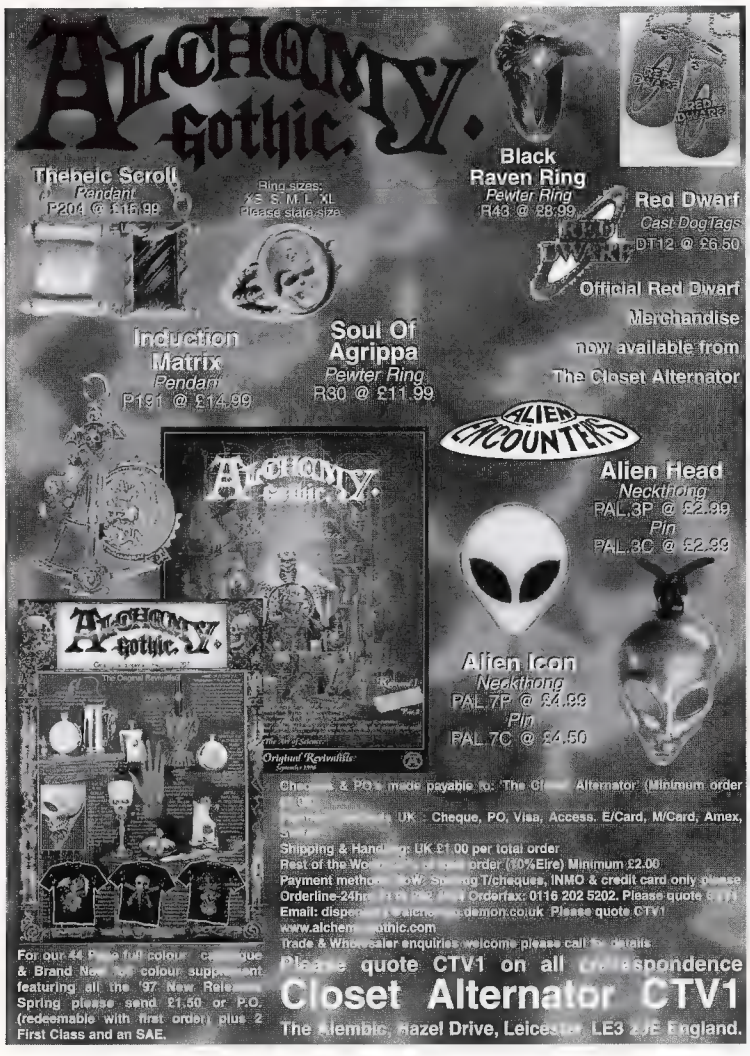
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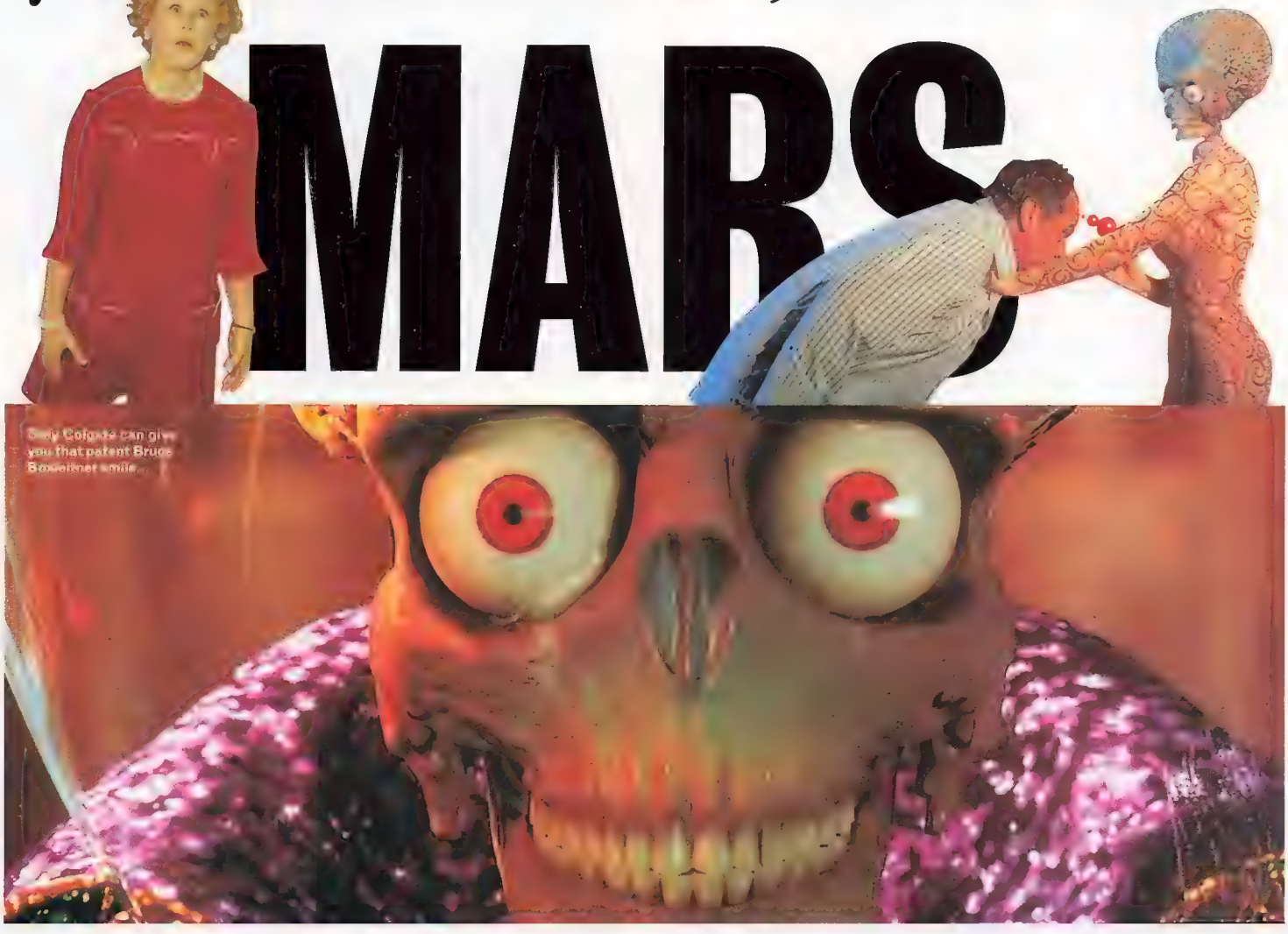
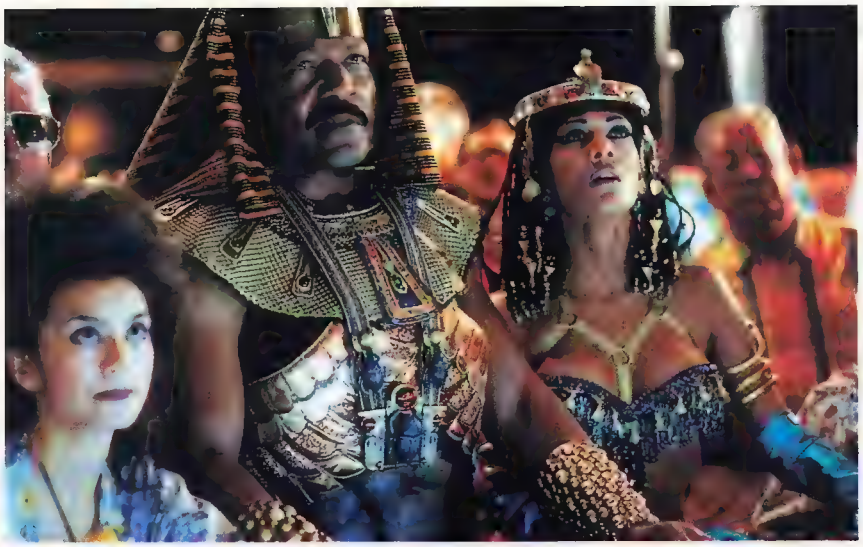
VIDEO Reviews

"Americans didn't enjoy this up-yours version of ID4, but we did!"

MARS ATTACKS!



Burton's killer-ETs-on-the-rampage epic is top entertainment, if a little slow...



Distributor: **Warner Brothers (1996)**
Director: **Tim Burton (Who else?)**
Starring: **Jack Nicholson (twice), Glenn Close, Annette Bening, Pierce Brosnan, Danny DeVito, Michael J Fox, Paul Winfield, Rod Steiger, Tom Jones, Sarah Jessica Parker, Uncle Tom Cobbley and all**
Cert: **12**
Release: **22 August**
Running time: **101 mins**
Price: **Rental**

Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

If you thought the Martians had odd dress sense, take a look at the Las Vegas lot upstairs... Totally out of this world, and off their heads with it.

The trouble I had getting this tape into my video... First, it refused to emerge from the box because one of the air-bags that had protected it in the post had failed to deflate, and then there was a communications problem between the tape and the video that meant none of the data got through. You'd almost think the Martians had something to do with Pathfinder's problems. Ungrateful little beasts – we send them brand a new car and all they can do is muck around with it...

Let's face it, we all know what we're getting here, because Europe went to see *Mars Attacks!* even if America didn't. If you're one of the few who didn't, then get down your local video rental outlet now. This is an up-yours version of *Independence Day* where the aliens have the moral values of a playground bully, and the humans are no better – we're a bunch of self-absorbed gits who only survive because our culture's produced things so terrible the higher powers of the universe simply can't cope with them. It's a good thing *Crime Traveller* wasn't around when this was made.

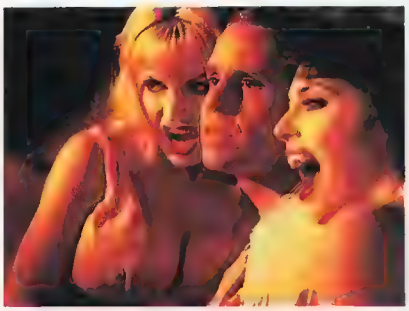
There's a gob-smacking Martian fleet which looks disappointing on the small screen, some great CGI Martians which look even better, a Danny Elfman score (and it's a new one this time, not another revamp of *Batman*), cameos by half of Hollywood and some brilliantly gruesome jokes. I know people who've laughed their heads off at this film – and that's not an expression.

There are, however, problems. Let's leave aside the sudden U-turn in the characterisation caused by Jack Nicholson's decision to play a dual role – the moment his slimy real-estate salesman bites the dust, wife Annette Bening develops an inexplicable attachment to Danny DeVito's slimy lawyer which only makes sense if they were originally the same character. No, the basic fault is that it's called *Mars Attacks!*, so we all know what's going to happen, but still have to wait the best part of an hour for the skull-headed horrors to do it. And what fills that time amounts to little more than an endless parade of "Meet the stars!", without much of a plot to keep the interest ticking over.

Unfortunately, Mr Burton has never been good on plots. Take a look at *Batman Returns* with your brain switched on if you ever want proof of that. Ultimately, that doesn't matter, as the fun lies in watching the stars do their cameo deaths and the Martians going on a gleefully destructive murder spree. But the set-pieces come in clumps, particularly a great five-minute burst where the Martians knock over Easter Island, take tourist snaps of the exploding Taj Mahal and silence Big Ben once and for all. A few more of these a little earlier on, and a bigger role for Lisa Marie's Martian spy, might have made this one of the all-time greats.

If Kennedy were president, he'd never get near that bed.

DRACULA DEAD & LOVING IT



With only two hot vampire babes (instead of the normal three), it's no wonder Renfield looks glum.

Distributor: **CIC (1996)**
Director: **Mel Brooks**
Starring: **Leslie Nielsen, Peter MacNicol**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **86 mins**
Price: **Rental**

Reviewer: **Vlad Simpson**

With a screenplay by Mel *(Young Frankenstein)* Brooks and Rudy *(Frankenstein General Hospital)* De Luca, which of these films do you suppose *Dead And Loving It* most resembles? In fact, this is a fairly straightforward spoof of the Stoker novel – simplified, of course – but it's woefully short on jokes. And what few jokes there are get heavily telegraphed beforehand and laboriously explained afterwards. The whole thing is like a bad pantomime.

The presence of Leslie Nielsen bodes ill for a project like this. People associate him with *Airplane* and the three *Naked Gun* movies, but seem to forget the catalogue of crap he's also starred in, from *Spaceship* to *Spy Hard*, via such joke-free bombs as *All I Want For Christmas*, *Repossessed* and *Surf Ninjas*. Nielsen's screen *persona* only works with a good script and a straight-faced supporting cast, neither of which are in evidence here.

Oh sure, there are a couple of funny lines, but not nearly enough to classify this as a comedy. And it's all so heavy-handed, with Peter MacNicol as Renfield mugging like a man possessed. Only Lysette Anthony as a suitably Hammer-esque Lucy lifts the film above the level of "terrible."

With a definitive Dracula comedy *(Love At First Bite)* already in the can, this should never have been made. However, comparison with the rest of Brooks' *oeuvre* does add weight to my thesis that *Spaceballs* is actually quite good.

A comic horror film with Leslie Nielsen? Don't you remember *Repossessed?*

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The month in VIDEO

SF AND FANTASY VIDEO FARE TO WHILE AWAY THOSE SUMMERTIME BLUES...

LORD OF ILLUSIONS

(1996) MGM/UA Video

Cert: **18**
Director: **Clive Barker**
Starring: **Scott Bakula, Famke Jansen, Kevin J O'Connor, Daniel van Bergen**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **112 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Reviewer: **Mark Harris**

The moral of this film is simple. Never, ever say, "We'll bury him so deep, no-one will ever find him," especially when you're referring to a cult leader

Is Swann (Kevin J O'Connor) a mere conjuror or a real magician?

with magical powers. Common sense? Not to the band of pesky kids who shoot and bind The Puritan (van Bergen), a charismatic fellow with a penchant for juggling fire and unaided flying. With a glorified dog muzzle round his chops, The Puritan is supposedly buried safely underground for 15 years.

Then members of the loony-interring team start dying – tortured, run over and in the case of the arch-goodie Swann (O'Connor), impaled by swords during his own magic show. Basically, the Puritan's evil flock are trying to find where he's buried so they can dig him up and, well, see what happens.

Needless to say, our hero, Harry D'Amour (Bakula), a psychic PI in LA for an insurance fraud case, is soon sucked into the whole bloody mess, battling evil with one hand while he learns some bedroom tricks from the dead illusionist's wife Dorothea (Jansen) on the other.

There are twists and turns, and even a familiar face in a somewhat risible cameo, and Barker manages to keep the pace up with plenty of blood, special effects and screaming. The final showdown at the cult's desert hideaway should disappoint no true horror fan (zombies anyone?), although it does slow down a little just when it should be rattling home.

Anyone familiar with Barker's writing and films will know roughly what to expect, and it's nice to see he's toned down the fantasy-style demonic invasion theme a bit in favour of decent plotting and slightly fleshed-out characters.

No classic, then, but an above average horror flick with an interesting theme. Paul Daniels, eat your heart out. Now there's an idea for a horror film...

B-

THE OUTER LIMITS

THE NEW SERIES VOLUME 10

(1996) Beyond Vision

Cert: **15**
Directors: **Tim Bond ("Valerie 23"); Mario Azzopardi ("Resurrection")**
Starring: **William Sadler, Sofia Shinas, Nancy Allen, Heather Graham, Dana Ashbrook**
Release: **11 August**
Running time: **85 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Reviewer: **Cavan Scott**

The current practice of grouping episodes into themed video releases might sound a good idea, but unfortunately it doesn't quite work here – it just smacks of *déjà-vu*, and monotonous *déjà-vu* at that.

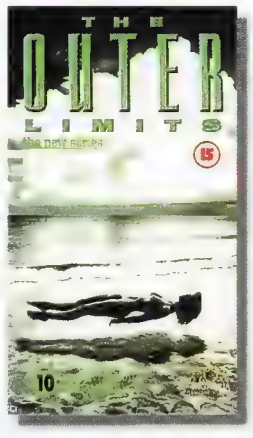
This problem is exemplified with this tape's grouping of "Resurrection" with season one's "Valerie 23," both of which tackle the science fiction favourite of android existence, questioning the viewers' preconceptions of what defines life itself. In "Resurrection," we see a world populated solely by the prototypes for soldier and servant robots programmed to serve the now extinct human race. In the midst of a quest to improve the quality of android life, two scientists break their society's strongest taboos by genetically creating a human being.

While the basic premise of the tale is an interesting take on the man versus machine saga, with subtle use of make-up and special effects, the story is let down by a lacklustre performance by its sole human lead. In a huge missed opportunity, *Twin Peak's* Dana Ashbrook displays less emotion than his supposedly passionless co-stars.

The tables are turned in "Valerie 23 ," in which an experiment throws paraplegic Frank together with an automatic babe-substitute. The drama generates from the bizarre eternal triangle of Frank, his physiotherapist, played by Nancy Allen of *RoboCop* fame, and Valerie herself, who begins to develop levels of jealousy which push her programming into madness.

If anything, this release is noticeable for its full frontal nudity. While some may justify the increased exposure of the gorgeous Sofia Shinas as an important development, the sudden appearance of a pair of breasts in "Resurrection" simply smacks of pointless titillation to help the viewer forget about the crap plot. A series of such standing as *The Outer Limits* shouldn't have to resort to such tricks.

C



BABYLON 5

VOLUME 24

(1996) Beyond Vision

Cert: **12**
Directors: **Menachem Binetski ("Voices Of Authority"); David J Eagle ("Dust To Dust")**
Starring: **Bruce Boxleitner,**

MADNESS! MANGA

EASTERN ANIMATION REVIEWED...

ELLCIA

PART ONE

Cert: **12**
Director: **Noriyasu Kogawa**
Starring: **Folk wi' swords**
Release: **11 August**
Running time: **45 mins**
Price: **£12.99**

C

EVANGELION

VOLUME 3 (EPISODES 5-6)

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Hideaki Anno**
Starring: **Big robots**
Release: **11 August**
Running time: **55 mins**
Price: **£12.99**

B-

Distributor: **AD Vision**
Reviewer: **Guy Haley**

Teenboy fantasies with weapons feature in the manga swords-and-science saga, *Ellcia*. The evil kingdom of Megaronia has unearthed the technological relics of an earlier culture and conquered the rest of the world, including Eija, whose King and Queen have been killed and young prince imprisoned.

Now the evil princess Crystal, fearful of a prophecy which predicts the fall of Megaronia when a giant ship hoves into view, hopes to use Prince Elluri, the Chosen One, to find said ship and, using it for herself, thus avert her downfall...

This first episode introduces a huge cast of characters: a band of pirates, led by Eira, and the baddies, principal among them being the clingingly clad Crystal. She is the best things about *Ellcia*. "I wish you'd been born a man," says her dad,

ruefully. She and henchmen mercilessly slaughter whole tribes of folk in a bid to find the mighty vessel in a very convincing baddy-like way. Unlike her soppy sister, who cries a lot, "I love the smell of fire-gel in the morning," she says after bombing a defenceless village... Sadly, this knowing nod to *Apocalypse Now* is not indicative of the story as a whole.

The good guys are laugnably two-dimensional, and the animation displays occasional lapses into four-frames-a-minute-mation, betraying anime's *Bambi* roots with innappropriate eye-quivering. Things would be bearable – the story has rapid pace and good design (including some great insectoid ornithopters) – if it weren't for the droves of annoying children who inexplicably make up half of Eira's crew. They, and the bad theogonist, gratingly shriek and wail throughout the tale in a desperate attempt to inject poor slapstick humour. This can only fail embarrassingly. And it gives you a ringing headache...

These are not problems shared by the superlative ***Evangelion.*** In this latest instalment, episodes five and six, we get to see a little more into the psyche of the EVA 00 pilot Rei Ayanami (although the fact you're told at the start that she doesn't have a past rather spoils it for those who'd rather have worked it out along with Shinji). But why is the world not devastated? Tokyo in part one was a real mess, but now everything seems hunky-dory. The only other worry is that the series, after an excellent start, appears to be becoming a mere "monster of the week" bash. Thankfully, the characters remain engaging and multi-faceted (for anime, anyway), and, apart from the naff "Fifth Angel," the animation is consistently excellent. *Star Fleet* for the '90s? Reckon so.

Walter Koenig, Claudia Christian, Andrea Katsulas, Peter Jurasik, Mira Furlan
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **84 mins**
Price: **£12.99**
Reviewer: **Sarah Mainprize**

Casual viewers might find *B5's* complex political intrigue overwhelming, but then again it's not your run-of-the-mill SF show. This double-bill, however, should appeal to both newcomers and long-term fans.

In "Voices Of Authority," Sheridan deals with a glamorous yet tyrannical political advisor sent by Earth's new government, who's into strict codes of conduct, purges and seducing station captains. Meanwhile, Ivanova gathers allies among the First Ones, and her adventure on the Great Machine unearths evidence proving President Clark was responsible for his predecessor's assassination.

The steady flow of action and quick-fire dialogue keep the interest level above average, and it's quite humorous in places – especially Sheridan's admirable handling of the unwelcome advisor's equally unwelcome come-on.

"Dust To Dust" is slower, but twice as intense. Bester visits the station to sniff out an illegal drug developed to enhance telepathic powers, which has dangerous side-effects. G'Kar decides this would be handy for getting into adversary Londo's head, but goes a bit psycho on the stuff and almost kills him while under its influence.

While the violence is slightly shocking, the trippy mind-rape sequence is suitably compelling. G'Kar receives a massive blast of Londo's life, including a moment of great revelation, and also has visions of his father and a prophet (which is actually ambassador Kosh getting in on the act), who both speak profoundly about revenge. Londo survives and G'Kar retreats to the local lock-up to write about his enlightening experience.

These episodes offer intrigue, drama, dirty politics, plot development, good characterisation and comic relief.

B+

The Frighteners

(1996) CIC

Cert: **15**
Director: **Peter Jackson**
Starring: **Michael J Fox, Trini Alvarado, Peter Dobson, John Astin**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **105 mins**
Price: **Rental**
Reviewer: **Dave Golder**

Forget all this nonsense that's been written about *The Frighteners* being a film of two halves – a spooky screwball comedy that suddenly turns into a video nasty. The film does change in tone, sure, but it's a far more gradual process, and right from the start there's a nasty streak underpinning the humour, while at the end the shocks are still laced with a nice line in black comedy. And the best thing of all – Australian director Peter Jackson handles both with deft skill.

Michael J Fox is Frank Bannister, a psychic investigator in a sleepy Fairwater, who can actually communicate with spirits. He uses his spooky companions to drum up business, by getting them to haunt houses which he then "exorcises." Trouble is, there's a new ghost in town, one with an ambition – an ambition which means killing off a good chunk of the town's population. And Bannister always seems to be around when the

MAGNIFY!

Size isn't everything

Honey, We Shrunk Ourselves

(1997) Buena Vista

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Dean Cundey**
Starring: **Rick Moranis, Bug Hall, Robin Bartlett**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **72 mins**
Price: **Rental**
Reviewer: **MJ Simpson**

When Disney released *The Return Of Jafar* in 1993, it was the first direct-to-video sequel to a major movie, and showed that there was a profitable market for such things. Straight-to-vid sequels to *Beauty And The Beast, The Little Mermaid, Aladdin* (again) and *Toy Story* are either already out or being developed. Now "the Mouse" has taken the next logical step, by making a straight-to-video addition to their most profitable live-action franchise.

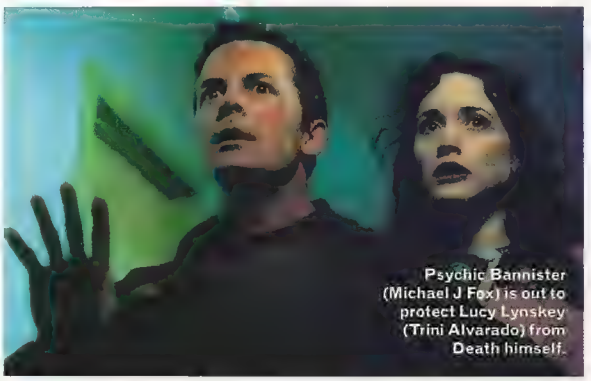
To clarify, Disney live-action movies have had video *premières* in the UK before (notably the two *Mighty Ducks* sequels) before, but they were merely US theatrical releases that were too crap to release at the flicks. But the difference here is that *Honey We Shrunk Ourselves* was actually made for video, which is something of a first. (On-the-ball readers will also realise that it's the fourth entry in the series. For details of the third *Honey...* movie, see the letters page in SFX6.)

So what have we got? Well, **essentially it's a remake of the first film with the roles reversed.** Two sets of parents (inventor, wife, brother and sister-in-law) get shrunk and have to attract their kids' attention. The journey is from the attic to the living room, rather than the length of the back garden, but all the expected set-pieces are included. There's a wild ride (in a Hot Wheels loop-the-loop toy car); a gosh-wow ride (in bubbles from a bubble machine); a fearsome insect (cockroach); and a benevolent insect (a craneфly with eight legs and no wings (?)).

Rick Moranis is back as Wayne Szalinski, the archetypal Disney mad scientist, while his brother Gordon is played by Stuart Pankin *(Nearly Departed, Congo).* The screenplay is by Karey Kirkpatrick *(James And The Giant Peach),* Nell Scovell (producer of *Sabrina The Teenage Witch)* and Joel Hodgson (creator of *Mystery Science Theater 3000!).* The end result has all the subtle comedy of *MST3K,* the dangerous satirical subversion of *James And The Giant Peach* and the subtle moral message of *Sabrina!*

It also marks the directorial debut of Dean Cundey, a cinematographer who has worked on more top SF/fantasy films than you could shake a stick at, among them *Back To The Future I-III, Halloween I-III* and *Apollo 13.* His helming of *Honey I Made A Contrived And Highly Improbable Error Involving My Shrinking Machine IV* is competent, except in the Hot Wheels car ride, which is totally devoid of any thrills, even on the small screen. I suspect children will love this video – especially as it includes basic instructions on how to make a chilli volcano! – and won't mind the rather laboured moralising 'n' forgiving at the end. So on the basis that it's aimed at kids, it serves its purpose. Not one for after the pub, true enough, but certainly worth renting when your brother's brats are over for the weekend and it's tipping down outside.

B+


Psychic Bannister (Michael J Fox) is out to protect Lucy Lynskey (Trini Alvarado) from Death himself.

The month in VIDEO

Michael J Fox demonstrates the best way to watch *Family Ties* reruns – *The Shining* style!

townsfolk say goodbye to their Earthly bodies.

US audiences were left rather underwhelmed by this bizarre mix – presumably they like their movies neatly labelled, and went along expecting Michael J Fox does *Ghostbusters*. But the very thing which spelled its death at the US box office, turns out to be its greatest strength – it's a **surprising, clever, witty and often shocking** movie, which is just what you'd expect from the director of *Bad Taste* given a big budget.

The main let-down is the trite ending and the variable performances. If nothing else, though, it's worth watching for the clever use of CGI and the almost Gilliam-esque villain of the piece. **A-**

Doctor Who

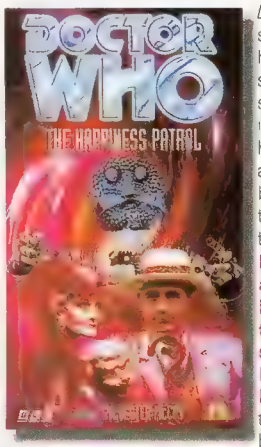
The Happiness Patrol
(1988) BBC Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Chris Clough**
Starring: **Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred, Sheila Hancock, John Normington, Lesley Dunlop**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **74 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

Do you think *Doctor Who* should be gritty, down-to-Earth and action-packed? Then avoid "The Happiness Patrol," Pertwee fan. Everyone else can read on.

Yes, this is *that* infamous story, the one featuring a monstrous Bertie Bassett... Personally, I quite like the Kandyman, as he adds the final edge of satirical absurdity to one of the better Sylvester McCoy stories.

The Doctor's heard disturbing rumours about Terra Alpha, a planet whose Thatcherite ruler treats depression as a capital crime, so he's decided to set it to rights. Now the way he goes about this was a little unsatisfying back in 1988 when the story was first aired... He encourages a couple of demonstrations by setting a defiant example, convinces some guards they don't like massacring people, and the evil dictator hastens to do a runner. You couldn't help wondering why Helen A's regime hadn't fallen years before if it was that unstable. Of course, a year later the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and Romania's despised leader turned tail at the sight of a few hecklers, and it all became a lot more credible...



For once *Doctor Who*'s studio setting helps tell the story, although some moodier lighting would have helped, as an evocative blues score is left to create most of the atmosphere. **Ronald Fraser and Sheila Hancock steal the show as a space age Denis and Margaret**, while the glucose-based alien's "fondant surprise" provides a classic addition to the series' list of novel execution methods.

"The Happiness Patrol" is far from perfect, but by the standards of an era when "experimentation" was often an excuse for sloppiness, it's at least genuinely original and different. **B-**

STAR TREK

Latest DS9 and Voyager rated

Voyager
Volume 3.9 (1997)
Directors: **Robert Duncan McNeill ("Unity"); Alexander Singer ("The Darkling")**
Starring: **Kate Mulgrew, Robert Picardo, Jennifer Lien, Lori Hallier, Robert Beltran** **B+**

Deep Space Nine
Volume 5.9 (1997)
Directors: **John T Kretchmer ("A Simple Investigation"); Siddig El Fadil ("Business As Usual")**
Starring: **Rene Auberjonois, Armin Shimerman, Steven Berkoff, Dey Young** **B+**

Cert: **TBC**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **88 mins**
Price: **£12.99 each**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

Making love with a shapeshifter offers interesting possibilities...

Borg! I wouldn't say *Voyager's* producers are desperate, but the third's season's much-trailed new direction has proved a bit of a damp squib. So the big bad cyborgs of the *Trek* universe have been called in to deliver a misjudged PR boost. Whoopee-do.

"Unity" is actually a good episode underneath it all. The problem is that it's been advertised as the return of the Borg, and trailed by a cliffhanger ending to the previous tape as Chakotay discovers a Borg corpse which has no bearing on "Unity"'s plot. You suspect the writers didn't know it had happened either until they tuned in themselves. And that's because "Unity" is a small-scale Borg episode in the style of "I Borg," where the assimilating ones' presence is meant to come as a surprise. It's a real pity, as the conclusion's rather chilling, despite Janeway's decidedly ham-fisted moralising.

Similarly disappointing is "The Darkling," in which the Doctor develops an evil alter-ego after importing personality traits from some of history's geniuses. Robert Picardo is as great as ever and Jennifer Lien gets to play a good sub-plot about the "mid-life crisis" facing Kes now she's split with Neelix, but it's let down by *Voyager's* predictably lazy technobabble plotting. Given the chance to let Tuvok demonstrate Holmesian logic by drawing a conclusion from the lack evidence at a crime scene ("The dog which did not bark..." and all that), the writers instead drop in a technobabble trace unique to holograms to show the Doctor's guilt. This is the sort of thing which gives *Voyager* a bad name...

Over on the good side of the franchise, things continue through a quiet patch. "A Simple Investigation" finds Odo falling in love, and inevitably his paramour is a deceitful criminal on the run. One can quibble with the whole notion of Odo having sex and it's obvious from the word go that they'll be tragically parted, but as so often this season the actual way it happens is rather clever.

"Business As Usual" doesn't quite make the same standard, as the moral dilemma – Is Quark's lust for profit enough for him to sell arms designed to murder 28 million people? – is laid on a bit thick and the ending is distinctly unconvincing. But it emphasises quite how immoral most Ferengi really are, how Quark's always had his own moral code, and how Sisko and co have always cut him a little slack as a result – until now. Professional stuff from a series which is beginning to bear comparison with *B5*...

Worf's left holding the baby as O'Brien gets some sleep in "Business As Usual" (left), while Odo's lover proves cruelly two-faced (right).

MATILDA

(1996) Columbia TriStar

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Danny DeVito**
Starring: **Mara Wilson, Danny DeVito, Pam Ferris**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **94 mins**
Price: **Rental**
Reviewer: **Andrew Osmond**

"I'm smart, you're dumb. I'm big, you're little. I'm right, you're wrong. And there's nothing you can do about it."

It's tough being a kid in a Roald Dahl story. When you're not being gobbled by giants or zapped by witches, you have to deal with equally fearsome grown-ups, most of whom are stupid, selfish or just plain homicidal. Luckily, Matilda, the six year old heroine of this junior empowerment fantasy, is more than a match for anything the world throws at her. Not only is she a maths genius and a superliterate bookworm (her favourite reads are Dickens and Melville), her telekinesis levitates people and blows up TV sets.

Director-star DeVito has done this lesser-known Dahl story proud, successfully mixing cartoon violence, sharp wit and one of the least patronising voice-overs in film history. Husband-and-wife DeVito and Perlman steal the show as Matilda's brain-dead parents. Embeth Davidtz is sweetly bland as the angelic teacher-turned-social worker, while Pam Ferris is a revelation as the psycho headmistress Trunchball ("Children! Glad I never was one!"), a cross between a PE teacher and a rhino on heat. Youngster Mara Wilson (the sprog in *Mrs Doubtfire)* leads effortlessly as a pre-teen Carrie, wiping the floor with the "adult" world.

Nasty teacher at the top, nice teacher below. Always the way.

Bits to watch for: Trunchball's child-throwing, a great *Clockwork Orange* spoof where Matilda is forced to watch junk TV, and, best of all, a cake-eating scene which outdoes Python's Mr Creosote for sheer grossness. For "demented, drooling, slime-breath little Lilliputians" – i.e. children – it's a must. Older Dahl fans will love it too. Indeed, this Dahl adaptation beats even the animated *James And The Giant Peach.*

B+

One of this lot isn't going to survive this tape – take a guess which one!

V VOLUME 5

(1985) Beyond Vision

Cert: **PG**
Directors: **Gilbert Shilton ("The Conversion"); Kevin Hooks ("The Hero")**
Starring: **Michael Ironside, Jane Badler, Faye Grant**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **84 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

All right, listen up! If you were just about to skip this review, because you couldn't face hearing how dreadful the latest batch of *V* episodes is, then hold your horses. These two are *good.* We're talking in-your-face anger, submerged angst and on-going plotlines where events have consequences.

To start with, there's "The Conversion." The Visitor fleet's new commander, Charles, begins his tenure by subjecting the captured Ham Tyler to the conversion process. After some nightmarish scenes in which Tyler's memories of his long-dead wife and child are merged with visions of Donovan presiding over the Visitors' food-processing plants, Tyler becomes a fully-fledged assassin programmed to kill Donovan in the middle of a televised prisoner exchange.

Anything which gives Michael Ironside the chance to pull out the stops is bound to be good – imagine a softened version of *TNG's* "Chain Of Command" – and the rest of the episode actually matches him, with some pacy action sequences and a surprising conclusion. Okay, so Duncan Regehr's Charles has walked out of a *Pet Shop Boys* video, but somehow the increasing campness of the Visitors counterpoints well with the new take on the Resistance – a hard-edged, anti-heroic band stressed out by tension, who squabble in the most viciously personal terms and can't allow themselves the time to grieve for lost comrades. It's all dark, at least for American television, just as a resistance drama should be.

If that's good, "The Hero's" even better. The open city's authorities decide to crack down on the Resistance once and for all. So, they arrest a batch of known sympathisers, and order their execution – one hostage a day, until Tyler, Donovan and Parrish give themselves up. It's as simple as that, but despite the cute kids there's some good playing from the hostages waiting to die, particularly Bruce Davison's guilt-ridden war correspondent, and the inevitable happy ending is undercut by a subtly foreshadowed twist. Hell, they even manage to provide a rationale for some of the series' most outlandish elements!

But this is still *V.* There are embarrassing moments of comic relief, but leavened by moments of deadpan black humour that actually add to the tension. And then, just when you least expect it, one of the regulars gets killed. No heroic sacrifice, no warning; it's just zap and he's gone. It's so fast you can't believe it's happened and keep expecting some incredible return from the dead.

Basically, if they'd carried on making them like this, *V* would have run for years, and TV SF might be very different today.

A-

Peter Weller battles to prevent a disaster – a sequel to *Screamers!*

SCREAMERS

(1996) Columbia TriStar

Cert: **18**
Director: **Christian Duguay**
Starring: **Peter Weller, Jennifer Rubin, Andy Lauer**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **104 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Reviewer: **Sarah Mainprize**

Laugh? I nearly died! From the naff scrolling prologue with electronic voice-over to the "He's finally escaped... Or has he?" ending, this is an inferior hotch-potch of such SF staples as *Blade Runner, Alien, Terminator, Total Recall...* Only without their cleverly crafted stories, excellent characterisation, good actors and staggering sfx.

Why Peter Weller wore a mask in *RoboCop* I'll never know, as his range of expressions extends to one – haggard. He's the hero, who's trying to make headway in a war between workers posted on a remote mining planet and their government, the New Economic Block. To complicate matters, a mechanical weapon has developed intelligence and is modifying itself into a whole breed of killing machines.

The film largely consists of Weller wandering around desolate landscapes and dark underground bunkers, unintentionally funny gory bits, a silly soundtrack and a guy you know must be bad because his voice is even gruffer than Weller's. It's as if the two got sidetracked into having a Husky Voice Battle and spent all their time shouting meaningless rubbish at each other.

The movie owes its darkness and pessimism to the Philip K Dick story "Second Variety," on which it's based, but if you fancy watching this kind of thing, stick to one of the afore-mentioned films where it's been done infinitely better.

***Howlers* would be a more appropriate title for this stinker.**

D+

SF Video Charts

Trek's Still Tops

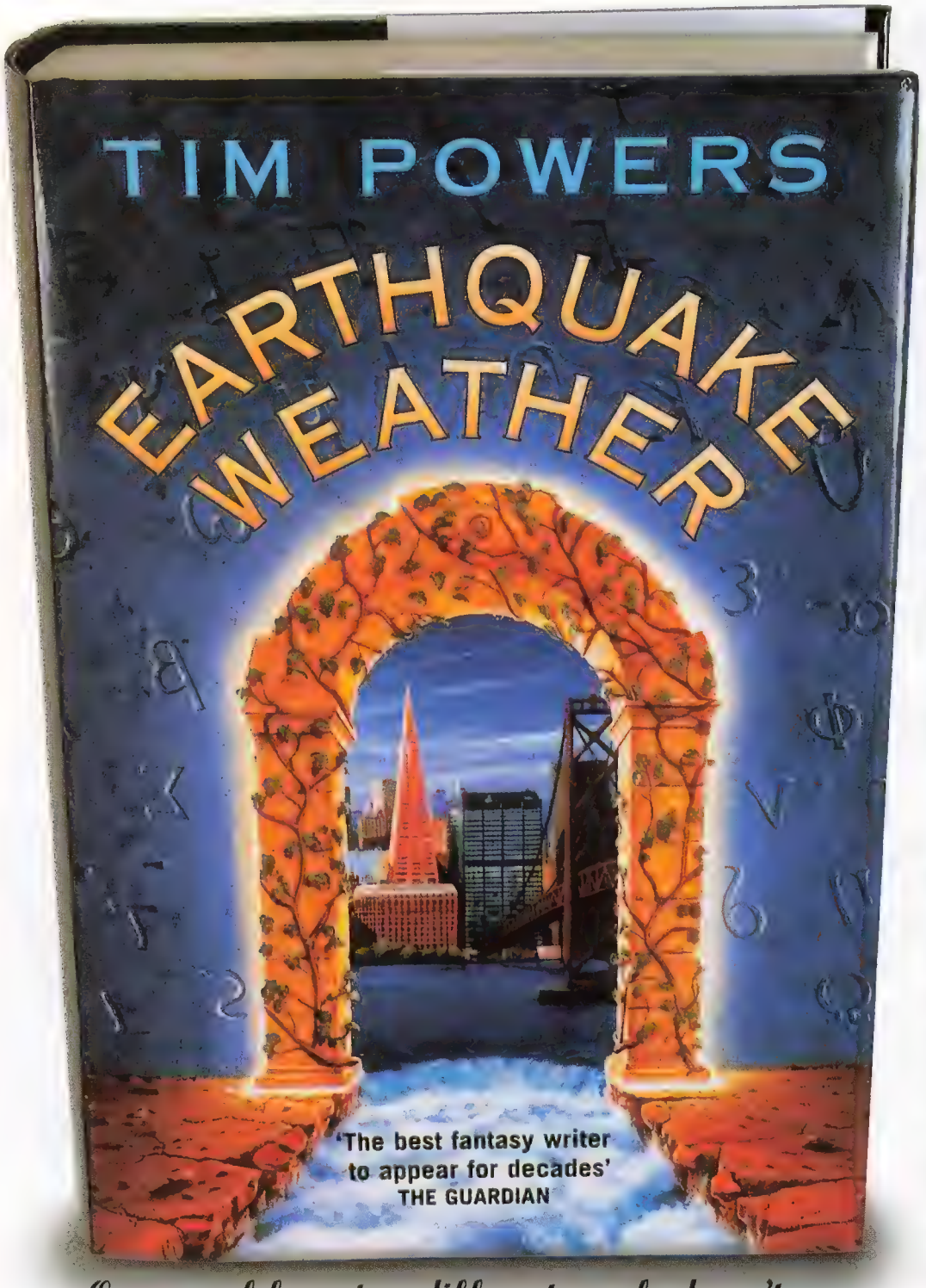
JMS fails to rout Roddenberry.

The Forbidden Planet SF Top Ten

1. **Star Trek: Voyager Volume 3.8** (CIC)
2. **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Volume 5.8** (CIC)
3. **Babylon 5 Volume 23** (Warner)
4. **The New Outer Limits Volume 9** (Warner)
5. **The X-Files Season Two** (Fox)
6. **Doctor Who: The War Machines** (BBC)
7. **Star Trek Volume 2.7** (CIC)
8. **The Dark Secrets Of The Simpsons** (Fox)
9. **Day Of The Beast** (Tartan)
10. **Iceman Cometh** (Hong Kong/DISC)

BOOK Reviews

"It putters around for ages before developing much plot tension."



EARTHQUAKE WEATHER

One sequel from two different novels doesn't go.

Author: **Tim Powers**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£17.99, 565pp**
ISBN: **0-09-956011-9**

Reviewer: **David Langford**

You can expect two things from a Tim Powers fantasy. First, it'll rewrite our world in strange ways, revealing complicated and painful magic under the surface. Second, someone will be violently separated from part of their body. In this book, it's a hand that gets lost. Twice.

Earthquake Weather is doubly weird because it's a double sequel. Powers' *Last Call* featured ghosts, magically booby-trapped card games, attempted identity theft and a one-eyed hero who finally emerges as a modern Fisher King to redeem the wasteland of Las Vegas. *Expiration Date* used ghosts differently, as the psychic equivalent of cocaine in a corrupt Los Angeles where snorting spirits is the ultimate, rejuvenating high, and top-grade ghosts such as Edison's or Houdini's are chased like the Maltese Falcon for their rare "recreational" properties.

This new novel is a sequel to both, which makes it distinctly clotted as Powers combines two cast lists and two extensive backgrounds of richly tatty detail. Freudian psychology, multiple personality disorder, Hispanic folklore, Edison's spirit telephone, Latin palindromes, Tarot, the Winchester Mystery House and several ancient myths (especially that of Bacchus or Dionysus) are all woven together.

What slowly emerges is that Scott Crane, the secret King Of The West, has partly failed in his duty, causing phylloxera lice to ravage the Californian vineyards. In fact, Crane is killed before this book begins. Most of the rather shambolic storyline features attempts either to revive his undecaying corpse or to crown a replacement, and therefore heal California. The obvious heir is young Kootie from *Expiration Date,* who has the traditional wound in his side that won't heal. (Kootie? Cultist parents gave him the Theosophical name Koot Hoomie, poor kid.) But there are many complications.

Too many, perhaps. *Earthquake Weather* putters around for ages with misguided rituals of resurrection before developing much plot tension. The streetwise magic is fun – an antique TV can tune in on ghost channels, etc. – but often inconsequential. With the exception of one interestingly barmy psychiatrist, the bad guys are routine secret-society heavies. The climax, although it does eventually hit just the right note, is prolonged, tortuous and slightly confused. Powers revised both prequels after first publication... Maybe he hasn't finished with this one either.

You come to like the characters, though, and to wonder how many will survive the final encounters with raving Bacchanals, sinister hitmen and a god who's fond of earthquakes. Particularly fascinating is Ms Plumtree of the many personalities, whose crowded head has long contained one murderous ghost (her father's – what would Freud say?) and who has to take additional passengers aboard as things grow more convoluted.

Powers' fans won't want to miss *Earthquake Weather,* however sprawling, but new readers should try the prequels first.

B+

SLANT

Author: **Greg Bear**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 491pp**
ISBN: **0-09-93508-1**

Reviewer: **David Langford**

Greg Bear comes in two flavours. The first does Widescreen blockbusters in which he cheerfully reduces the population of North America to sentient goo *(Blood Music),* smashes Earth to bits *(The Forge Of God),* creates construction projects bigger than the universe *(Eon)* and then messily blows them up *(Eternity).* The other Bear goes for dark, dense, broody books about a mid-21st-century full of mixed blessings, such as the *Queen Of Angels* and its indirect sequel, *Slant.*

Slant is shaped like a complicated thriller, the sort where painstaking cops – including Mary Choy from *Queen Of Angels* – slowly fit together unconnected-seeming fragments into a very ugly picture. Pieces include nasty deaths, a guilt-ridden multi-billionaire's suicide, mercenaries planning their high-tech assault on a cryonics store, and an unstoppable mind plague that's stripping away the "therapy" which is all that keeps people sane in this high-stress future. Meanwhile, on the datanet, something nasty is scorching through computer firewalls and wiping out the protected records – and human lives – which might have a clue to what the hell is going on.

It's a good story, and can be left to take care of itself. But there's an underlay of darker stuff here too. The downside of *Slant's* future is fraught with bad sex, poisoned love and emotional black holes. Clearly, Bear is a long way from being a back-to-Nature evangelist, but he has a lot to say – obliquely – about the sterility of fun technologies like teledildonics. Underlining this point, the awesome intellect of the world's first true AI (already met in *Queen Of Angels)* turns out to be seriously outclassed by a messy, yucky, organically-based rival.

Slant reads compulsively well – it's less intimidatingly jargon-ridden than *Queen* – and it ends on a note of hope despite all the gloomy undertones. Virtue triumphs, sort of, and perhaps just one of all the book's doomed couplings has been fruitful. A superior, thoughtful SF thriller which could put you off sex for quite a long time.

A-

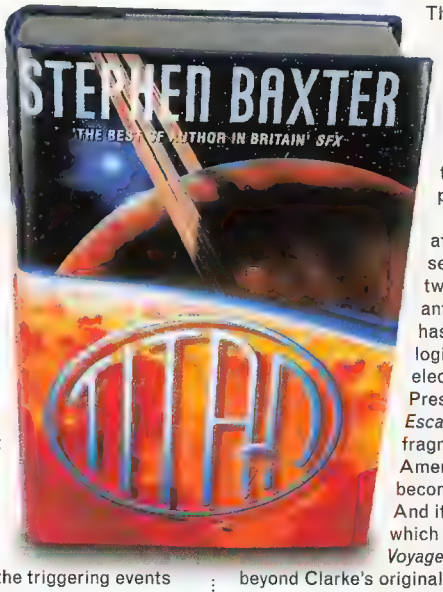
TITAN

Author: **Steven Baxter**
Publisher: **HarperCollins Voyager hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 582pp**
ISBN: **0-00-225424-7**

Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

The reviewer's lot is not always a happy one – terrific little books you want to savour slowly, but have to finish before next morning's deadline... 700-page epics which change direction halfway through, just as you've started enjoying them... But worst of all is a great novel made even better by sudden unexpected plot twists. You know the trailers will reveal every surprise in a film, so there's hardly any point in keeping quiet... But a book?

So read on at your peril. Established Baxter fans may prefer to content themselves with the news that the boy's done good again, producing a worthy follow-on to *Voyage. Titan* takes the same mix of re-applied technology and political might-have-beens and uses them to send humans to the moons of Saturn, while bringing in new elements to ensure it isn't a simple rehash.



However, even Baxter can't avoid using what are rapidly becoming the *cliché* plot elements of '90s SF's principal genre, the near-future space novel. As in Buzz Aldrin's *Encounter At Tiber* (**SFX15**; A), the triggering events for a re-invention of America's space programme are a second shuttle disaster and evidence of life in space. But whereas Aldrin optimistically envisaged America beginning work on a properly thought-out space programme able to move step-by-step towards the alien bases, Baxter takes a more pessimistic view. The loss of Columbia is a terminal blow to NASA, whose administrator already knows he's there to wind the agency down. But his staff would prefer that the surviving hardware, even the rusting Saturn Vs, be used for a Titan-or-bust mission to another world rather than sent to a museum – or scrapped.

The characters are much as you'd expect (a grizzled old Moonwalker who can't adjust to life on Earth, a driven woman astronaut and spaced-out visionary astrochemist...) and as in *Voyage* it's the women who are really at the centre of things. This is perhaps a slight mistake, as it means things are a little too similar, but while you start to assume the men will prove themselves weak, the way they do so is often a surprising contrast to the way their archetypal predecessors did in *Voyage.*

It's as Baxter's motley crew attempt to build space's first self-supporting colony that the twists really start to flow. The anti-technological mood which has destroyed NASA reaches its logical conclusion with the election of a fundamentalist President, and Baxter moves into *Escape From LA* territory. America fragments, the Chinese respond to American belligerence by becoming more paranoid in turn... And it all develops into a story which has moved as far beyond *Voyage* as Kubrick's *2001* moved beyond Clarke's original short story, "The Sentinel."

In the long run, the comparison to *2001* proves apt. This is a tale of equivalent scope, while the visions of Titan life have that sense of "Clarke-style cosmic sorrow," as Dave Langford put it. It's not as wide-ranging as the Xeelee cycle, but there's a sense in which *Titan* encapsulates the author's entire work to date. A worthy addition to the Baxter *opus.*

A

Rian Hughes

The month in BOOKS

SOMETHING FOR THE HAMMOCK OR THE GARDEN SWING ON AN EVENING...

THE BUTCHER OF GLASTONBURY

Author: **David Bowker**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 224pp**
ISBN: **0-575-06254-1**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

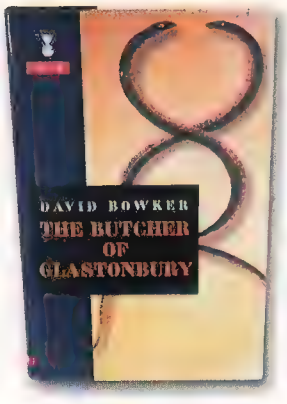
Merely catching criminals isn't enough to ensure a self-respecting detective stands out from the crowd – they need some sort of gimmick, whether it's moonlighting as a chef or travelling around in a wheelbarrow. Superintendent Vernon Laverne's distinction is that he carries his cases squarely into the realms of the paranormal – though you wouldn't guess that from the cover blurb.

Deciding how to bill a book is always a problem: label it as a paranormal mystery, and readers will expect the bizarre, but if it's left as a surprise, how do the supernaturally inclined know to pick up it up?

Perhaps wisely, *The Butcher Of Glastonbury* assumes the reader missed out on Laverne's largely overlooked debut *(The Death Prayer)*, and lets the supernatural elements creep in unexpectedly. A Glastonbury family have been hacked to death, leaving their teenage daughter as the only witness to an attack which lasted less than a second. Mystified, the local police seek the help of DS Laverne, a man with a disconcerting record of solving crimes through pure instinct.

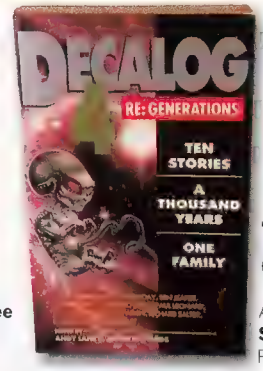
What follows is a slow-building chiller, which introduces supernatural elements from unexpected directions, and works equally well as a teasing whodunnit. I spotted the killer early on, swapped suspects soon after, but still got taken by surprise at the end. Even the cop-out ending works well in context.

With a TV version of *The Death Prayer* already in the works, **now's the perfect time to catch up on Laverne before he gets too popular.**



DECALOG IV - RE: GENERATIONS

Editors: **Andy Lane and Justin Richards**
Publisher: **Virgin paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 293pp**
ISBN: **0-426-20505-7**
Reviewer: **Dean Evans**



From its origins as a hotbed of *Doctor Who*-inspired short fiction, the *Decalog* series has become a showcase for established SF authors and the brightest, up-and-coming talent. But while the previous three books kept their vision firmly within the *Doctor Who* universe, *Decalog IV* has been forced to cast its net a little wider, its ten interlinked tales moving beyond the world of the eccentric BBC Timelord to explore fresh ideas, new themes and original settings.

Clustered together under the banner "Ten stories – A thousand years – One family," *Decalog IV* expands upon the family history of Roz Forrester, the Doctor's companion from The New Adventures. Where before readers were afforded only brief glimpses of her background, *Decalog IV* serves it all up on a silver platter, ten centuries, ten stories, tracing the Forrester family line from Jack Forrester, a spacestation mechanic, through to Leabie Inyathi Forrester, Divine Empress, Lord General Of The Six Armies and Defender Of The Earth.

It's a neat idea, a gaggle of stories accessible not only to widely-read *Who* fans (who'll no doubt appreciate the Forrester connection), but also to the broader SF audience who appreciate fresh and imaginative writing. With only the Forrester name to bind the tales together, each writer has been able to let his imagination run free and so *Decalog IV*, with its mish-mash of styles and ever-evolving technologies, cultures and characters, is rarely dull. Admittedly, as the centuries pass, the rate of advance slows down and in the middle of the book your attention flags, but it picks up with a great story by Peter Anghelides ("C9H13NO3") and manages to retain enough momentum to carry you through to the end.

Well written and imaginative, *Decalog IV* still lacks the satisfaction of a full-blown novel, but excels more often than it bores. Think of it as *Dynasty* in the stars...

THE GOD GAME

Author: **Gerald Suster**
Publisher: **New English Library hardback**
Price/page count: **£35.99; 373pp**
ISBN: **0-340-66648-X**
Reviewer: **Simon Clark**

Want to investigate the paranormal? Be warned: occult phenomena are allegedly infectious. So if you must hunt poltergeists in Bavarian castles, expect your books to start flapping around your home all by themselves.

Now if this phenomenon extends to buying a novel that positively cascades with the occult, then reading *The God Game* will have your favourite armchair dancing like Mel B, and, yes – goddammit – poor old pussy's gonna get sucked right through the TV screen.

Gerald Suster has suffered media attention at its most malicious and downright libellous. His only crime, a scholarly interest in the occult. Lesser men would have quit; Suster came out fighting and successfully sued for libel before carving his own unique niche in the horror scene with some powerful and decidedly strange novels.

The God Game is no exception. It doesn't so much have plot strands as plot fibres – myriads of them.

The story takes place both in present day and Victorian London. The modern day hero is Adam Stride, novelist and private detective; the Victorian hero, Arthur Machen (1863-1947), a real-life writer and occult investigator.

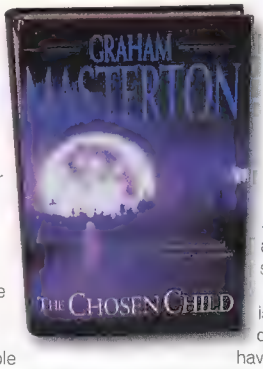
Machen's autobiography describes bizarre encounters with the paranormal, including occasions when he was stalked by fictional characters from his own books. Suster develops this weirdness in *The God Game* with the heroes being hounded by characters they believed to be fictional as they investigate the origins – and power – of an ancient ankh.

The tale is delivered *portmanteau* style, with linked short stories that range from the eerie to the graphically horrific. Relentlessly, Suster piles mystery on mystery: pacts with the devil, vampirised slaves, sex with the living – and the dead – the Holy Grail, ghosts and cannibalism, all mingled with glimpses of ineffable mystery. Oh, and lashings of near-pornographic descriptions of gourmet meals. But how does it all end? As Machen would rap: *Omnia exenunt in mysterium.*

All this makes for **a complex, fascinating, occasionally baffling yet demanding read.** If you relish *X-Files* episodes at their most brilliantly impenetrable grab a copy of *The God Game* and fill your boots! I loved it.

THE CHOSEN CHILD

Author: **Graham Masterton**
Publisher: **William Heinemann hardback**
Price/page count: **£17.99, 424pp**
ISBN: **0-434-003158**
Reviewer: **Mark Harris**



If you're choosing one horror book to read to a blind, sensitive relative, don't make it *The Chosen Child*. There are more consonants in this book than there are descriptions of water-borne human waste, but only just. *The Chosen Child's* setting, the sewers of contemporary Warsaw, challenges the reader to wade through names as thick as human *excreta* (Brzezicki, Plac Trzech Kryzyzy) and underground scenes best left to rodents and Water Board employees. But don't let that put you off. Masterton's tight plotting and convincing narrative pulls you in like a freshly flushed turd down the drain.

The story is deceptively familiar. Someone, or something, is decapitating people around the city, often on waste ground or building sites. The police, led by Komisarz Stefan Rej (from the Wydzial Zabojstw no less), are

predictably baffled. Cue the entrance of beautiful Sarah Leonard, an American businesswoman in charge of constructing a five-star hotel in the heart of the city. After a series of deaths at her building site, she gets more involved in the investigation than she bargains for, and we meet plenty of slime, both above and below street-level.

The plot unfolds wonderfully, drawing in mysticism, Nazis, organised crime and medieval genetic experimentation. The mysterious killer is genuinely scary, and will certainly dissuade the casual reader from venturing into Warsaw's sewage system. For die-hard gore buffs, there's slicing-and-dicing galore, but never at the expense of tension and mounting terror.

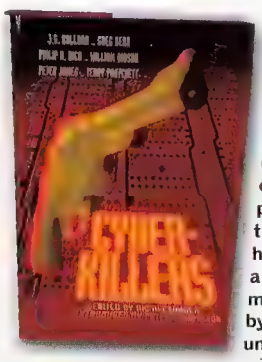
Masterton writes about Poland with affection and insight, giving *The Chosen Child* an extra depth that complements his studious attempts to avoid a formulaic conclusion. And there's certainly a touch of Poe to Masterton's writing, even if he occasionally lacks subtlety and sureness.

A vivid portrayal of the painful emergence of Poland from the security of Communism, *The Chosen Child* is a damn good modern ghost story to boot. Just don't read it on the loo.

A-

Songspinners

Author: **Sarah Ash**
Publisher: **Orion paperbacks**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 325pp**
ISBN: **0-75280-582-7**
Reviewer: **Ruth Pracy**



The first thing that strikes you about this book is the appalling typeface. It's so small you're in danger of serious eye-strain by the time you reach page 20. Which is a real shame, because it's a pretty good story, dripping with atmosphere and peopled by some particularly strange and intriguing characters.

It's set in a Renaissance world where a dogmatic religion has supplanted a magical earlier civilisation. The central character, Orial, is a throwback to these former times and people, a child of a different species on the verge of a transformation which could save her country and free the neighbouring lands of tyranny. It brings to mind Charles L Harness' classic genre piece *The Rose*, and I wonder if Sarah Ash had it in mind when she wrote this...

There's the same mysticism, the same themes of the overwhelming power of music, a female central character who's becoming more than human, a bizarre male companion who she saves through self-sacrifice, and mystical central images of white and red roses.

But while *The Rose* is a great classic of the SF/fantasy genre, *Songspinners* isn't in the same league, mainly because it's nigh on impossible to find an original theme in a market as already crowded as fantasy's is now. But whether Ash intended the parallels or not, this is a remarkable tale which should expand the reader's horizons, just as *The Rose* did in 1953.

B+

Cyberkillers

Editor: **Ric Alexander**
Publisher: **Orion hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 408pp**
ISBN: **0-75280-783-8**
Reviewer: **Chris Boucher**

It's easy to forget that the short story is SF's purest and arguably truest form. Novels inevitably command more attention and the best are rightly admired as powerful achievements. But the single electrifyingly original idea presented by a talented writer at his or her peak is a wonder, made more delightful by sheer unexpectedness.

This inevitably presents the anthologist with a problem: find a unifying theme without built-in predictability. *Cyber-killers* is a decent try, but on a straight read through, too many of the stories bear passing similarities to make it an unqualified success. The line-up is stunning but the theme limits the choices so that **great practitioners are not necessarily represented by their best work.** The Anderson, Clarke, Dick and Niven stories are all perfectly readable, but indistinguishable, for instance. A further letdown for the Gibson or Bester fan is that their stories are inevitably familiar (unavoidable given their small bodies of work). It has to be noted too that much of the collection is less than current.

That said, there's some good stuff – the Pratchett (previously unobtainable) is a surprise, and the Zelazny is worth the price of admission alone.

With 24 stories to choose from, any reader should find something pleasurable, even if this anthology isn't quite as sparkling as its list of stars suggests.

B

STAR TREK

The New Frontier

Peter David, an established *Trek* novelist whose name is a pretty reasonable guarantee of quality, has suited up and climbed out of the airlock. In *House Of Cards* and *Into The Void*, parts one and two of the New Frontier series, he's left behind the four established *Trek* scenarios and created a new ship with a new crew facing a new enemy and a new situation – the collapse of a xenophobic empire.

Well, almost new. Three crew members, Shelby, Selar and Lefler, were *TNG* walk-ons and the USS Excalibur whizzed briefly across the screen in part two of "Redemption." Spock, Jean-Luc Picard and the Enterprise-E bridge crew are also brought on, not exactly kicking and screaming but almost, to add a bit of texture to the backstory that takes up most of book one.

The format of the New Frontier series is another new departure. The books are short (150-160 pages long) and equate quite neatly to 45 minutes of screen time, divided neatly between action, character development, info-dumping and comic relief in the set proportions familiar from the TV shows. The first two books end with cliffhangers. These are prose episodes rather than novels.

Does it work? By and large, yes. You may find the format distracting, even irritating, but **once David gets into his stride, the quality of his writing and the strength of his characterisation is sufficient to keep the pages turning.** Captain Mackenzie Calhoun is an interestingly different kind of starship captain; cynical, but by no means squeaky-clean – "an officer," he says of himself, "but not a gentleman." Also, the lines between good guys and bad guys are sometimes intriguingly blurred and there's a fascinating glimpse into Starfleet's dirty tricks department; for once in *Trek*, nobody's perfect.

It may look like a gimmick – indeed, it may well have started out as one – but thanks to David's skill, there's a chance this new range will create something genuinely original.

House Of Cards

Price/page count: **£2.99, 168pp**
ISBN: **0-671-01395-5**

B

Into The Void

Price/page count: **£2.99, 151pp**
ISBN: **0-671-01396-3**

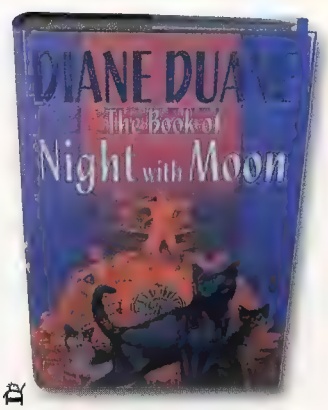
B+

Author: **Peter David**
Publisher: **Pocket Books paperbacks**
Reviewer: **Tom Holt**

Captain Calhoun and Commander Shelby face their greatest ally, their most formidable enemy!
STAR TREK
NEW FRONTIER
BOOK TWO
PETER DAVID
New Frontier concept by John J. Ordover and Peter David

The Book Of Night With Moon

Author: **Diane Duane**
Publisher: **Hodder and Stoughton hardback**
Price/page count: **£17.99, 404pp**
ISBN: **0-340-69328-2**
Reviewer: **Andrew Osmond**



Odd title, odd book. It's easy to see many would-be buyers skimming the first chapters of this one before putting it back on the shelf. After all, the set-up looks horribly twee. The idea of a

The month in BOOKS

gang of anthropomorphic cats having magic adventures in modern Manhattan may be fine for a Disney cartoon, but surely it can't support a doorstep novel?

But it can. The trouble is, *Night With Moon* hides its true colours rather *too* well: it's not a dumb "grown-up" fantasy, but a very sophisticated children's tale. It's actually the sequel to Duane's exuberant *So You Want To Be A Wizard* series (marketed for children, and acclaimed as such) although the former's human protagonists are here only cameos. Thus the limelight falls on the feline wizards, whose cats' cradle ability to weave dimensional gateways puts them on the front-line against universal entropy. When Manhattan's worldgates are sabotaged, it's up to three cat-friends – and one rank outsider – to brave the "Downside," a primeval universe where myth and reality are one.

As the *précis* suggests, *Night With Moon's* lightweight front hides a remarkably elaborate scenario: creation myths and quantum theory interweave in an otherworld which feels like *Jurassic Park* as written by Robert Holdstock. While there's a little too much exposition, Duane's writing is lucid and often lyrical – the first visit to prehistoric America is especially vivid. **The story intensifies superbly as it goes on, with dark journeys and some disconcertingly bleak scenes,** and there's an elegant moral twist just when everything seems about to collapse into *Dungeons & Dragons* territory.

And as for what happens to tenor Luciano Pavarotti.*

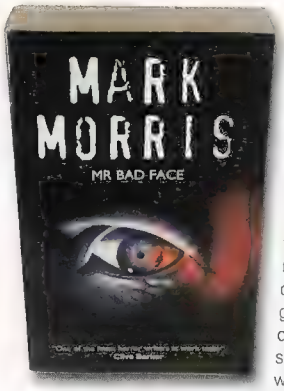
B

*He gets eaten by a T-Rex. They've got BIG appetites.

Mr Bad Face

Author: **Mark Morris**
Publisher: **Piatkus paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 432pp**
ISBN: **0-7499-3022-5**
Reviewer: **Angela Thompson**

Bargain of the century (a two-for-the-price-of-one deal Arthur Daley would've been proud of) or thriller attempting to masquerade as horror? I have to say that *Mr Bad Face* defeats me on that one. However, since when did an unanswered question stop anyone's enjoyment? "What's the meaning of life?" is still troubling me...



John Straker (aka Mr Bad Face) has had, by all accounts, a pretty rough deal at the hands of childhood friends Eric, Andrew, Jackie and James. Let's face it, most people would be pretty irked if a bunch of pesky kids came and set fire to their house. So now the little ones are all grown up he's come back to seek revenge and wreak havoc on their lives. In the Kosh-like words of Mr Bad Face himself, And Now It Begins...

Now this is where the thriller/horror problem rears its ugly head. The savage killing of Chloe and the dog's head in the post certainly lend themselves to the horror genre quite nicely (and indeed gruesomely), but **once we find out what's really been going on it's all a little disappointing.** Morris works hard to generate a moderate amount of sympathy for the vengeful acts of Mr Bad Face, only to inform us that life just ain't ever that sweet...

Beyond the slightly clichéd style that has undertones of both Stephen King and Lynda La Plante, *Mr Bad Face* tells a tale that will satisfy blood-and-guts fanatics, but without foregoing a lively plot that entertains right up until the last moment.

B+

The Unofficial Book Of Star Wars Trivia

Authors: **Robert Bircher and Rachael Coulthurst**
Publisher: **Summersdale paperback**

Pitch Black

Nice pics, shame about the words in this standard *Making Of* tome...

The Making Of Men In Black

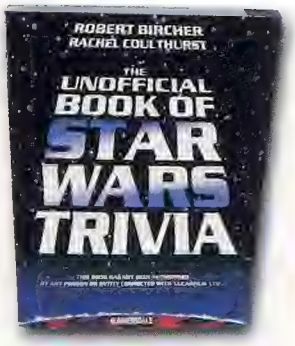
Authors: **Barry Sonnenfeld and co**
Publisher: **Penguin paperback**
Price/ page count: **£9.99, 163pp**
ISBN: **0-14-026889-8**
Reviewer: **Guy Haley**

***Men In Black:* The movie. They have big guns. They chase alien criminals. They protect Earth from the scum of the galaxy. And they wear black. MIB has turned into the hottest SF film of this year, full of humour and, yes, a story. What, I hear you say, a special effects driven SF flick with a plot? And I thought that the great and good of Hollywood had decided not to bother us thickos with that kind of thing anymore...**

In *The Making Of The Men In Black,* the producers wear T-shirts, have beards and gush on about how cool it was working with each other and just how darned clever they are. **Although the movie manages to break the Hollywood mould, this book does not,** endlessly repeating itself while skipping from one shallow interview to another. It's not even that interesting – each interview frustratingly brushes on interesting topics before we get the mutual respect bit for three paragraphs. Haven't they realised that this kind of stuff just isn't interesting to us punters? It should have been a short magazine article. The script is, well, just that, and not one where you can spot the alterations, which is a shame as the screenplay went through a dozen rewrites.

The only thing that sets it above the rest of the herd is the amusing *MIB* handbook section. It's not hilarious, but it *is* funny, with crime sheets describing breaches of "State Law, Intergalactic Law and Murphy's Law." Buy it for the pictures...

C+



Price/page count: **£9.99, 190pp**
ISBN: **1-84024-024-5**
Reviewer: **Hillary Stephen**

This book has two obvious disadvantages before you even get to read the first page. First, it's "unofficial," which means no pictures, inside information about Lucasfilm or imaginative graphic design, and second, anything with the word "trivia" in the title is off-putting. But considering that, how does it stand up?

Well, there are better *Star Wars* books around and I'm sure you could find as much mind-boggling nonsense on the Net, but **if you're looking for something a bit different and fancy a laugh, try it.** There's a nice foreword by Michael Sheard (Empire's Admiral Ozzel, whose autobiography has just been released by the same publishers) and the *Star Wars* trivia itself can be interesting (particularly scenes on the cutting room floor), with a good section on the novels and comics at the back.

Unfortunately, it's let down by the "making of" sections and the character profiles, complete with information on the stars themselves, which are weak and written in a rather patronising manner. The question and answer sections on the films are tedious too, giving the distinct impression that the authors had nothing much else to do other than hammer away rather sadly at the pause button on their video recorders.

Provided you don't expect too much, this is worth a look-in, though I reckon you'd be better off buying it as a birthday present for a 10 year old who's got a few hours to kill.

C

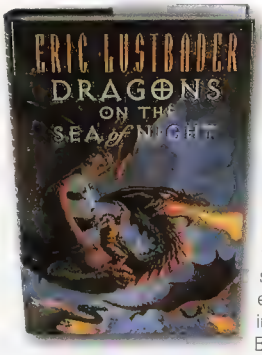
Dragons On The Sea Of Night

Author: **Eric Lustbader**
Publisher: **Voyager hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 291pp**
ISBN: **0-00-225005-5**
Reviewer: **Cavan Scott**

Reading *Dragons On The Sea Of Night* is like

watching a particularly impressive video on MTV. There's rich imagery, pockets of actions and a mass of colour, but not much depth.

This swords and sorcery tale follows the quest of a lone sea captain determined to avenge the demonic murder of his sister, while elsewhere a near-godlike being, the Dai-San, fights to prevent the creatures of chaos from entering the human realm.



From the first page, readers oblivious to the previous four Sunset Warrior novels will be at a disadvantage as a whole host of unpronounceable names and unfamiliar countries are thrown up to alienate newcomers.

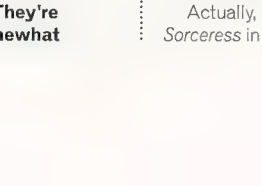
Lustbader clearly enjoys a healthy imagination, but **time and time again you'll simply be reminded of countless other fantasy novels.** None of the fast-moving fights excuse the shallow characterisation, while limited gore and bloodshed do nothing to hide the huge jumps from one scenario to another. Instead of setting off a rollercoaster ride of excitement, the jarring narrative simply leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

Failing to provide a magical saga full of mystery and intrigue, Lustbader only succeeds in teaching prospective writers the dangers of placing style over substance.

D

Dancing With The Dark

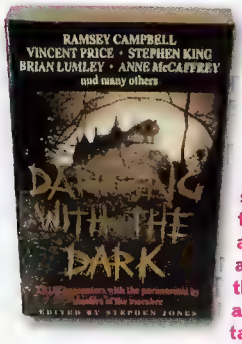
Editor: **Stephen Jones**
Publisher: **Vista paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 532pp**
ISBN: **0-575-60166-3**
Reviewer: **Lucya Szachnowski**



We've all read the book (or seen the film) about the horror writer who realises that the hellish entity he thought he'd created is real or the ghost story supposedly inspired by a real haunting. They're effective if somewhat hackneyed plots, but do such things happen in real life?

Dancing With The Dark is an attempt to find out, with over 70 exponents of horror and fantasy, from both sides of the grave, relating their own allegedly true experiences of the paranormal. Each entry takes the form of a short biography followed by a supernatural anecdote in the first person.

A large number of famous names appear among those admitting to supernatural encounters, including Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Neil Gaiman, Anne McCaffrey, HP Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe. The stories are, on the whole, short and concern fairly low-key incidents. There are plenty of visitations by dead relatives, odd sounds in old houses, strange intuitions that paid off, sightings of places that never were and a variety of uncanny religious experiences.



Few of the stories are terrifying, although they're all written with the skill of accomplished tale-tellers. This is not a book to chill the blood and send you on a garlic-and-cross shopping spree, but it is believable enough to make you think.

B

Polgara The Sorceress

Authors: **David and Leigh Eddings**
Publisher: **Voyager hardback**
Price/page count: **£17.99, 697pp**
ISBN: **0-246-13844-0**
Reviewer: **Ruth Pracy**

I very nearly missed out on reading this book. The moment it landed on my doormat, it was hijacked by my daughter with squeals of "Wow, another bit of the Belgariad..." It's moments like this which make you wonder whether wading through 700 pages in three days will be all that bad...

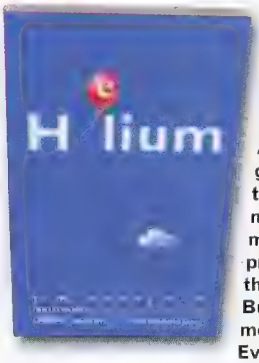
Actually, I read *Polgara The Sorceress* in two days, and ended up wishing it was longer. It's a wonderful book, which covers 3,000 years of history as described by Polgara, daughter of Belgarath – the whole of her life, in fact, up to the point where the first of the series, *Pawn Of Prophecy,* begins.

Final volumes (which is what this is, in writing order at least) are often inaccessible, but fortunately this one isn't, and the references there are to other volumes in the series add depth to the narrative rather than confuse the novice reader. The characters are vivid and genuinely likeable, and there's an easy lilt to the prose which makes reading it pure pleasure. **It's a long time since I found a novel I liked so much.**

A

Helium

Author: **Tim Earnshaw**
Publisher: **Gollancz paperback**
Price/page count: **£9.99, 189pp**
ISBN: **0-575-06471-4**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**



"Franz Kafka meets Frank Zappa." With a billing like that and a recommendation from the creator of *Men Behaving Badly*, I had to look over this one. You can see the reasoning (zonked-out one-time rocker who undergoes a curious transformation), but it's a little misleading.

One-time rock might-have-been Gary Wilder runs a music store and suffers from mid-life angst. Mostly over the usual things – runaway wives, lost dreams – but increasingly over the way his weight's reducing. It's as if gravity can't keep him down to Earth any more, and fairly soon even a lead-weighted diver's belt is having trouble doing the job...

This is only borderline SF – Gary's predicament is never explained, or resolved, and is more metaphorical than anything. Quite what that metaphor is, beyond a vague comment on the desire to escape the world, I'm not exactly sure, as ***Helium* rather suffers from its brief length.**

There's a lot thrown in, including an investigator from NASA's X-Files equivalent sent to check out the amazing gravity-defying rocker, the various members of Gary's old band, and an attractive neighbour with a tragic secret, but it's all too sketchy. An extra 100 pages could have built it into something far weightier.

Helium has an engaging writing style, mixing dialogue and narrative together well, but it's a little too light for its own good.

B

Longbarrow

Author: **Mark Morris**
Publisher: **Piatkus hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 442pp**
ISBN: **0-7499-0385-6**
Reviewer: **Simon Clark**

Do you want the good news or the bad news? The good news? Okay. Well, you've just inherited a mansion in the country. The bad news? Er, it's haunted. Ah, but the other good news is that the spirit is well-meaning and magical healing properties wash through the house. But wait, there's more bad news: Evil entities are hell-bent on stealing those magical forces. Oh bugger...

You could dismiss *Longbarrow*'s tale as just an old chestnut, but the idea that lies at its heart is so enduring as to be a mythic archetype that demands to be retold.

Morris' rendition of this theme has Susan Wisher and 12 year old son David inheriting a house in the delightful village of Longbarrow, Yorkshire, a place steeped in legend. Magical forces crackle through the earth, gravestones drip blood and only the enigmatic Mr Toot, village grocer, knows that soon the forces of good will clash with the aforementioned evil (and wonderfully named) entities.

After a cracking opening packed with eerie promise the book frustratingly veers from horror into literary territory as it details the romances, bereavements and lives of Longbarrow's folk. Only in the second half does Morris seem to remember that this is supposed to be a horror book.

Then he redeems himself beautifully, hitting us with a faster paced narrative that is gory, awe-inspiring, imaginative and resoundingly delivers what was promised in the first chapter. Nice one!

B

Out In Paperback

DARKFELL SFX17, C
Mary Corran, Orion
£4.99, ISBN: 0-75280-665-3
Five youngsters are haunted by their childhood experiences

PALACE SFX18, C+
Katherine Kerr and Mark Kreighbaum, Voyager
£5.99; ISBN: 0-00-648263-5
Adventures with an assassin journeying through cyberspace.

DESPERATION SFX17, C+
Stephen King, NEL
£5.99, ISBN: 0-340-65428-7
Low-key King with a string of in-jokes – the ultimate Stephen King mega-mix.

ENCHANTMENT'S EDGE 2: ORBUS'S WORLD SFX23, B+
Philip Williamson, NEL
£5.99, ISBN: 0-340-68224-8
Volume two of a compelling trilogy, which maintains a rattling pace right through to the cliffhanger.

CLOUD'S RIDER SFX23, A-
CJ Cherryh, NEL
£5.99, ISBN: 0-340-68912-9
A beautifully written fantasy about telepathic horses. Not much plot.

RED STAR RISING SFX18, C-
Anne McCaffrey, Corgi
£5.99, ISBN: 0-552-14272-7
A return to Pern as McCaffrey fills the gap's in the planet's history.

Newly reviewed

DOCTOR WHO: THE MURDER GAME
Steve Lyons, BBC
£4.99, ISBN: 0-563-40565-1
An old-fashioned isolated outpost tale starring the second Doctor – complete with killer dolphins...

DOCTOR WHO: VAMPIRE SCIENCE
J Blum and K Orman, BBC
£4.99, 0-563-40566-X
San Francisco's vampires fight a civil war as the eighth Doctor tries to find a cure for their condition.

Best-selling SF Books

Mr and Mrs...

David Eddings' decision to co-credit wife Leigh has certainly not harmed sales...

The Dillons Top 10 SF Books

1 **Polgara The Sorceress** (David and Leigh Eddings, Voyager) £17.99
2 **The Ringworld Throne** (Larry Niven, Orbit) £5.99
3 **Nostradamus Ate My Hamster** (Robert Rankin, Corgi) £5.99
4 **3001 – The Final Odyssey** (Arthur C Clarke, Voyager) £16.99
5 **Byzantium** (Stephen Lawhead, Voyager) £6.99
6 **Rage Of A Demon King** (Raymond Feist, Voyager) £16.99
7 **Star Wars: The Paradise Snare** (AC Crispin, Bantam) £5.99
8 **Doctor Who: Vampire Science** (J Blum and K Orman, BBC) £4.99
9 **Paint Your Dragon** (Tom Holt, Orbit) £5.99
10 **Excession** (Iain M Banks, Orbit) £6.99

COMIC Reviews

"Refreshingly different and way more thoughtful than any other cape comic around."

THE SUPERMAN MADMAN HULLABALOO

A not altogether successful crossover, but Allred's artwork is, as ever, gorgeous.

Publisher: **DC/Dark Horse**
Writer/artist: **Mike Allred**
Issue: **part one of three**
Price: **£1.95**

Reviewer: **Dan Abnett**

Writer/artist Mike Allred is a genius, and his award-winning *Madman* is a truly inspired on-going creation. Somehow, though, this crossover doesn't really work. It's not that it's a crass cash-in crossover, or even a lampoon of the current trends for crass cash-in crossovers. No, the problem is that while the story seems a genuine attempt to interchange and explore these two distinctive comic figures, the two worlds they come from just don't mesh convincingly.

In the first issue, the hero of Metropolis and Snap City's idiosyncratic champion become linked by an interdimensional experiment and end up swapping certain features and characteristics, dumping each personality in the other's domain, with both inhabiting a body which is part Superman, part Madman.

Alienation is a strong theme of Allred's unique work, and there's plenty of it here. But part of *Madman's* appeal is the way he inhabits a beautifully rendered but simple world, evoking a Golden Age era – and Superman left that territory decades ago. The result is that Supes seems anachronistic and uncomfortable in Madman's streamlined *milieu*.

Nevertheless, the experiment is refreshingly different and far more thoughtful than any other cape comic around. Certainly, it's a must for any Allred fan and a good jumping on point for newcomers.

B+

Allred's simplistic art works fine with his own creation, *Madman*, but doesn't really suit Superman.

HELLBOY: THE LOST ARMY

Publisher: **Dark Horse**
Writer: **Christopher Golden**
Artist: **Mike Mignola**
Issue: **one-shot novel**
Price: **£12**
Reviewer: **Dan Abnett**

Now this *is* different. Mike Mignola's peculiar but strangely compelling comic creation, *Hellboy*, comes to us now in novel form, care of horror novelist Christopher Golden, with artwork by Mignola. It's a radical departure for the series, and clearly a crossover format experiment by Dark Horse.

Hellboy is an odd creation – a monstrous, semi-demonic but sometimes oddly flat character whose occult investigation adventures have appeared in a number of limited series. What made them compulsory reading was Mike Mignola's gorgeously graphic work, uniquely stylised and displaying probably the best composition in comics.

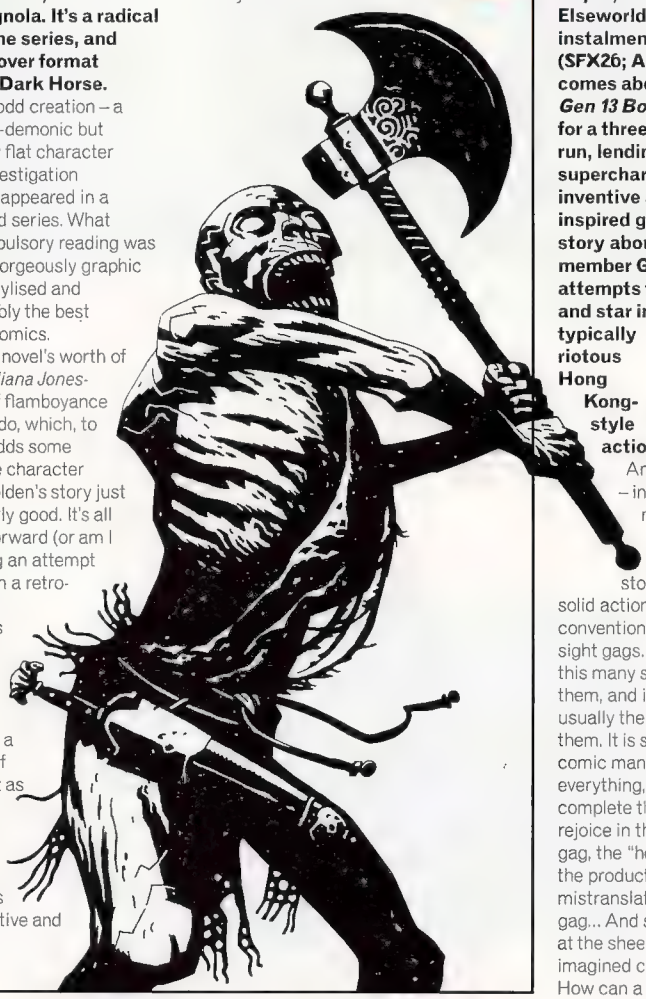
Now we get a novel's worth of Hellboy in an *Indiana Jones*-style romp full of flamboyance and derring-do, which, to its credit, adds some depth to the character itself. Sadly, Golden's story just isn't particularly good. It's all very straightforward (or am I misinterpreting an attempt to be simplistic in a retro-Rice Burroughs way?) and seems overly flaccid and under-developed. For compensation, however, you get a beautiful piece of Mignola's line art as spot illustration every couple of pages.

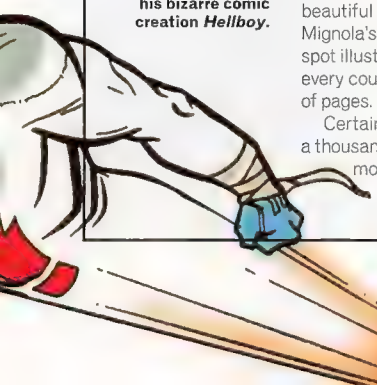
Certainly, it's a thousand times more creative and entertaining than any of its comic novelisation rivals, attractively packaged and not without a few good ideas. Let's hope they do more – but better.

(Above) Climactic events take place in an underground village where the populace is dying.

(Left) Abe Sapien is a humanoid who can breathe underwater.

Mike Mignola provides some very moody black and white artwork to illustrate the novel take (literally) on his bizarre comic creation *Hellboy*.





The month in COMICS

CLEVER AND FUNNY IN EQUAL MEASURE...

GEN 13 BOOTLEG

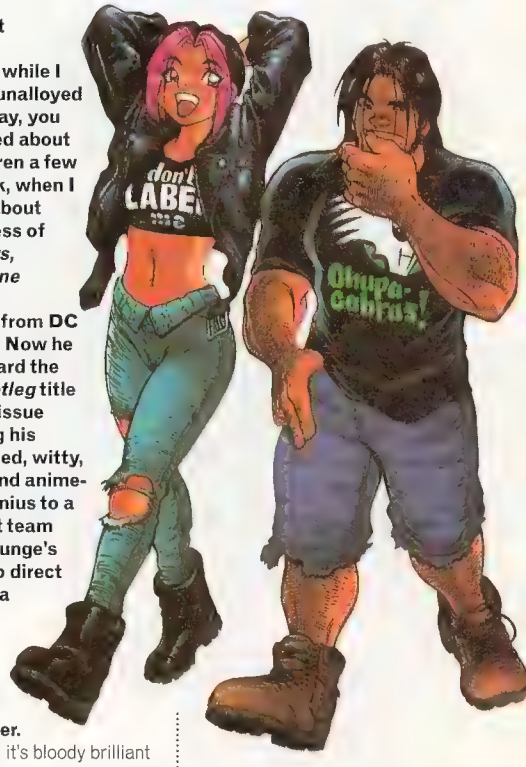
Publisher: **Image**
Writer/artist: **Adam Warren**
Issue: **8**
Price: **£12**
Reviewer: **Dan Abnett**

Pardon me while I drool with unalloyed delight. Okay, you were warned about Adam Warren a few issues back, when I ranted on about the greatness of his *Scissors, Paper, Stone* Elseworld instalment from DC (SFX26; A). Now he comes aboard the *Gen 13 Bootleg* title for a three-issue run, lending his supercharged, witty, inventive and anime-inspired genius to a story about team member Grunge's attempts to direct and star in a typically riotous Hong Kong-style actioner.

And it's bloody brilliant – informed, knowing, razor-sharp and witty, well-told, and full of extraordinary storytelling which mixes solid action with slapstick and conventional nuance with broad sight gags. Comics rarely have this many sensational jokes in them, and if they do, that's usually the best thing about them. It is so rare to find a comic manifesting quality in everything, even if the story is a complete throwaway. Just rejoice in the Steven Seagal gag, the "honkin' big eyes" gag, the product placement gag, the mistranslated subtitles running gag... And stare open-mouthed at the sheer miracle that is the imagined credit sequence... How can a comic (essentially a medium of flat, soundless, unmoving images) get away with a music and movement joke quite so well?

Do yourself an extraordinary favour and buy this right now.

It's in-jokes aplenty as the Gen 13 mob decide to make a movie.



Roxy and Grunge are inspired by seeing a Hong Kong action flick.

Best-selling Comics

Fast X-it

An oddly X-book free month.

1. **The Uncanny X-Men** #347 Marvel
2. **Cable** #46 Marvel
3. **Preacher** #29 DC
4. **Captain America** #10 Marvel
5. **Justice League Of America** #9 DC
6. **Gen 13 Bootleg** #9 Image
7. **The X-Files** #30 Topps
8. **Deadpool** #7 Marvel
9. **Maverick** #1 Marvel
10. **Superman – Man Of Steel** #71 DC

NEW MEDIA Reviews

"As a single-player affair, Turok is easily the best of the Doom/Quake clones."

DINOSAUR HUNTER

(Above) The vast levels and lush landscape detail really make the most of Nintendo's hot new console.

(Left) Giant lizards aren't the only enemy you're up against. Guys like this stick their mitts in too...

(Below) The terrifyingly realistic dinosaurs loom out of the fog. The way they charge is awesome!

The N64's answer to Quake, and then some.

Format: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **Acclaim** ☎ **(0171) 344 5000**
Price: **£69.99**

Reviewer: **Mark Ramshaw**

***Turok* has actually been available for a couple of months, but it's only with the recent price crash of the new Nintendo 64 console (from £250 to £150) that borderline purchasers are likely to be tempted by its prehistoric delights. And tempted you will be.**

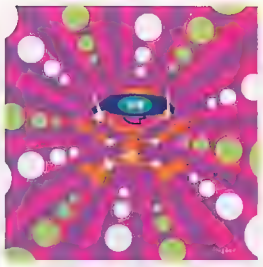
The game is based on not-very-well-known comic book hero Turok, a Native American time-travelling bloke, with a bit of talent for making dino burgers. Eight distinct lands await, as you guide Turok around using a first-person viewpoint that instantly brings to mind *Doom* and *Quake*. That *Turok* doesn't suffer in comparison is quite an achievement. In fact, as a single-player affair, *Turok* is easily the best of the bunch, featuring some amazing vistas and well-realised monsters.

The levels have also been designed to maximise the solo gaming experience, with a fine balance between outright carnage, exploration and problem-solving. With a mission to recover eight pieces of a special weapon, plus a whole bunch of keys giving access to the later levels, you really do have your work cut out. All too often you'll catch sight of one of these vital objects on the other side of a ravine, necessitating a treacherous jaunt through the treetops, down into the underground and even underwater to retrieve it. And all with an amazing attention to detail that marks the N64 system as a machine far in advance of its competitors. Only the use of heavy fog to mask distant objects suggests the game is stretching the machine to its limits.

The control system, too, has been fully tailored with the machine in mind, with the weapons at your fingertips bringing about some of the most explosive scenes ever used in a video game. *Turok's* richly detailed environments may look beautiful to start with, but it's when they're set ablaze with grenades, rocket launchers and particle accelerators that things really get exciting.

It's not an entirely flawless experience, admittedly – the way monsters can materialise fatally close by puts paid to that – but it's not far off. Indeed, it looks, moves and plays better than pretty much any other first-person shoot-'em-up on the market. It's more violent than a Tarantino flick, it's big enough to warrant that crazy price, and it instantly makes the N64 a must-have system for anybody with even a passing interest in ultra-violence peppered with dinosaurs. ☎

Monsters to die for, or more frequently by, walk the earth again, in the violent but excellent *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter*.



Rian Hughes

The month in NEW MEDIA

A Long Time Ago...

Dark Forces

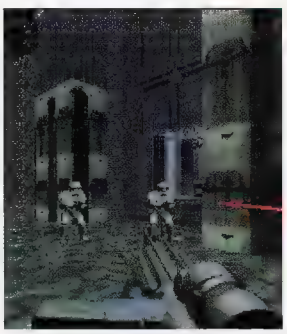
Format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Virgin**
☎ **(0171) 368 2255**
Price: **£39.99**
Text: **Mark Ramshaw**

PlayStation owners have had to wait a long time for LucasArts' *Doom*-with-Stormtroopers title to reach their system. They needn't have bothered. For while the programmers have done their best to make this conversion look and play like the original, it's pretty obvious the machine isn't up to the job. And two years on, the game's design is looking dated anyway.

As Kyle, a one-time follower of the Empire, now mercenary for the Alliance, you get to take on the sort of death-defying miss ons you'd expect Han Solo to be involved with, engaging in missions ranging from the usual wandering through corridors in search of vital plans to re-activating water-powered generators.

The problem is that it all boils down to pretty simplistic dodging and shooting. The *Star Wars* gloss is enough to keep interest up for the first couple of levels, but after that it's hard not to notice that the gameplay just isn't as tightly orchestrated as in *Doom*.

The sad fact is, the Force isn't strong enough in this one...



The gameplay is still there, but PlayStation *Dark Forces* is severely lacking in the technical department.

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TOSH Reviews

CAST ASIDE YOUR BLACK BUCKET, DARK LORD OF THE SITH, PLUS A NEW TRICORDER (WITH PLASTIC TOGGLE), TARZAN FIGURES, A CLASSIC (!) TREK SHIP, AND PENCIL...

DARTH VADER'S HELMET

Manufacturer: **Don Post Studios**
Available: **Space Odyssey**
Price: **£80**

Reviewer: **Gwidon Poleczko**

The shops are still awash with *Star Wars* tat, but favourite among the merchandisers of the world remains Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith. You can already buy his light sabre weapon, figures of varying quality and scale, even a kite with his ugly mush on. But until now you could never truly *look* like him in a faithfully reproduced helmet.

Thankfully, this replica helmet isn't a bad likeness at all. No really. Cast from high-quality plastic in two pieces, an almost totally head-encompassing mask, plus helmet, the main drawback is that it's a little difficult to get on, severed ear being a common problem. Once in place, however, breath reverberating, voice booming, it's great, and far more convincing and easier to see out of than an old bucket.

Just make sure you have a handy shoe-horn to get it off again...

A **It's big, it's black, you'll look a total prat! Fortunately, no-one will be able to recognise you...**

MEDICAL TRICORDER

Distributor: **Bandai UK**
Available: **All good toy/model shops**
Price: **£16.99**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

The medical Tricorder, perfect for every blue-uniformed Trekker who wants to ensure their fellow crew members can spot at a glance that they're a doctor, not a scientist.

The differences to the standard issue Tricorder are minimal. Same sounds, same buttons, but a different graphic on the screen. The main new feature is the extended top, which houses a dummy sensor, perfect for sensing dummies, presumably.

B

TARZAN FIGURES

Manufacturer: **Trendmasters (USA)**
Price: **Probably around £6-7 each (on import)**
Reviewer: **MJ Simpson**

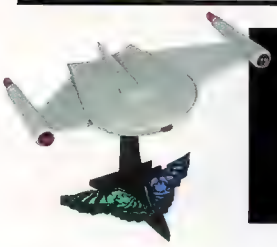
(Left to right) Tars Tarkas, Jean C Tarzan (his real name... Honest!) and Nolach, whose pus-filled head lifts off.

To tie in with the TV series *Tarzan – The Epic Adventures*, Trendmasters have produced a smashing range of figures, closely based on the descriptions in Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels. Three ranges are available: the Jungle series (includes Kerchak the ape, Numa the lion, a Leopard Man and three versions of Tarzan); the Earth's Core series (a Mahar, a Horib, King Kerchak and two Tarzans) and our favourites, the Mars series.

We bought Tarzan in his Martian White Steel armour, plus Nolach the Kaldane (Red Martian with detachable, pus-filled head) and Tars Tarkas, a six-limbed Green Martian. Also available are O-Mad-Zad the renegade Green Martian, a blue Plantman, Martian babe Dejah Thoris and John Carter himself.

As the TV series doesn't have the rights to the Barsoom stories, and ERB himself never got round to writing *Tarzan On Mars*, these toys give Tarzan fans a chance to finally bring the two worlds together. They're probably the first toys with genuine appeal for fans of literary SF too.

A-



ROMULAN BIRD OF PREY

Distributor: **Bandai UK**
Available: **All good toy/model shops**
Price: **£32.99**
Reviewer: **Anthony Brown**

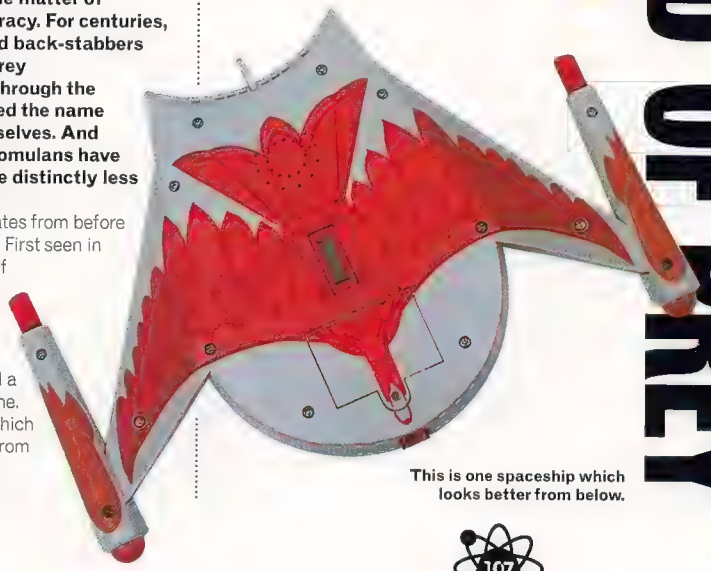
Despite all the rumours, the real reason the Klingon-Romulan Alliance fell apart was the little matter of trademark piracy. For centuries, the pointy-eared back-stabbers had flown Bird Of Prey spaceships, but halfway through the movies the Klingons nicked the name and registered it for themselves. And from that day forth, the Romulans have been forced to travel in the distinctly less trendily-named Warbirds.

This particular vessel dates from before that act of intellectual piracy. First seen in the first season's "Balance Of Terror," last seen (courtesy of stock footage) in, ah, "The Deadly Years," it's something of a one-day wonder in *Trek* terms, but still a pretty good design for the time.

The model's accurate, which is a slight pity. It looks great from below, with the bird-of-prey markings marred only by the screwheads, but the top is dull, dull, dull. A little bit of artistic licence with hatch coverings, airlocks, etc. would have helped to make it a bit more fun and in tune with the '90s.

And why Bandai failed to paint the markings on the top is a mystery. Must be that trade-embargo. Obviously the Federation refuse to export enough paint each year...

B-



This is one spaceship which looks better from below.

FREEBIE OF THE MONTH

captain star pencil

But what have pencils got to do with SF, you chorus. Well, more than you think... Properly known as a "graphite writing implement," they were discovered to be the weak point in the evil Thaarn's attempts to collapse the universe into a single black hole in *Blake's 7*. It failed, of course – the cheapskate should have forked out for some computers instead of expecting people to do the calculations by hand. And as Nyssa can tell you, when you're attacked by sword-wielding androids, you merely use the pencil to connect your sonic screwdriver to their control circuits and short out their chips.

No wonder Star wouldn't be seen dead without one!

OUT FOR THE COUNT

DRACULA

THEATRE ROYAL • BATH • FRIDAY 21 JUNE

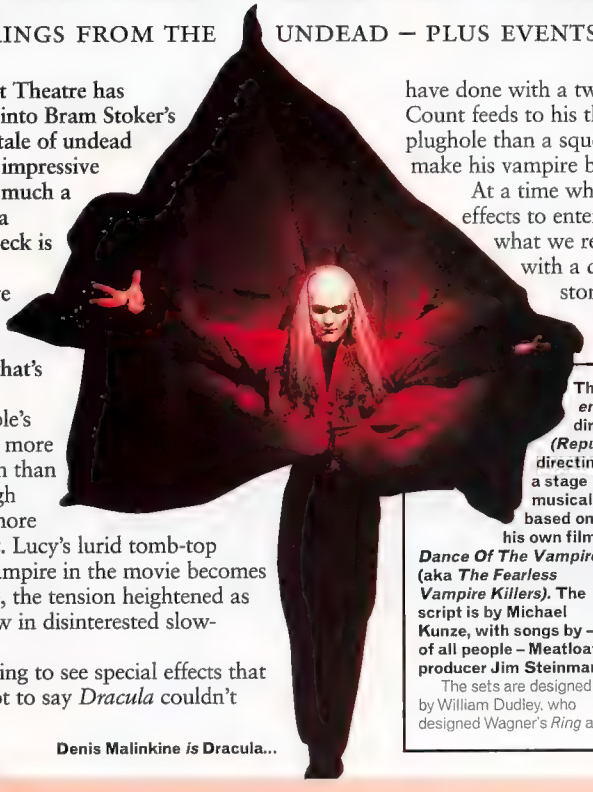
THIS MONTH, TWO OFFERINGS FROM THE UNDEAD – PLUS EVENTS TO NOTE DOWN FOR THE SUMMER.

The Northern Ballet Theatre has breathed new life into Bram Stoker's long-in-the-tooth tale of undead bloodlust, with an impressive production that's as much a feast for the senses as a length of virginal white neck is for the eponymous anti-hero. Fabulous Gothic costumes, innovative choreography and a heart-stopping score make it one of the best ballets seen this side of Transylvania – and that's even before you get to the gore.

Artistic director Christopher Gable's interpretation of the classic story has more in common with Coppola's 1992 film than any of the Hammer Horrors, although the terror of the tale is depicted far more subtly than in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Lucy's lurid tomb-top pounding at the hands of a bestial vampire in the movie becomes a tender-but-deadly balcony embrace, the tension heightened as her *fiancé* and friends dance on below in disinterested slow-motion. Enthralling stuff.

You don't go to the ballet expecting to see special effects that rival *The Fifth Element*, but that's not to say *Dracula* couldn't have done with a tweak in the dry-ice department – the bloody bundle the Count feeds to his three harpies sounds more like water going down a plughole than a squealing baby. But at least they resisted the temptation to make his vampire bat fly across the stage like some demonic Peter Pan.

At a time when movies rely on big budgets and even bigger special effects to entertain audiences, *Dracula* is a welcome reminder that what we really really want is something as simple as a good story with a decent soundtrack. Dramatic tension is what good storytelling is all about, and, thanks to the stirring score and riveting action, that's exactly what *Dracula* delivers. Wonder if it's coming out on video?



Denis Malinkine *is* Dracula...

The world's oldest *enfant terrible* director Roman *(Repulsion)* Polanski is directing a stage musical based on his own film *Dance Of The Vampires* (aka *The Fearless Vampire Killers*). The script is by Michael Kunze, with songs by – of all people – Meatloaf producer Jim Steinman!

The sets are designed by William Dudley, who designed Wagner's *Ring* at Bayreuth and won a BAFTA for the BBC version of *Persuasion*, while lighting designer Hugh Vanstone worked on one film-to-stage horror classic: the Nottingham Playhouse adaptation of *The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari* (**SFX7**, B-). With costumes by Sue Blane, who worked on the original stage version and film of *Rocky Horror*, *Tanz Der Vampire* promises to be a memorable show.

Tanz Der Vampire
Raimund Theater • Vienna • 4 October

If you fancy a trip to Vienna to see the performance, you can get ticket details by faxing +43-1-58830-430. Watch for more coverage soon in **SFX**.

Fantastic Days

Dates for your diary

All cons listed here are non-profit-making events organised by fans. Always enclose an SAE with enquiries. Con organisers, if your con is not here or your listing is wrong, send details to Live!, SFX, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW. You can find a more detailed listing at http://www.compulink.co.uk/~magician/conlist.htm

22-25 August 1997 *Terok Nor*
44th UK *Trek* con at Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. Even better (!), **SFX** and sister mag *Cult TV* will be attending, so come along and say hello. You know you want to. **338 Blackfen Rd, Kent DA15 9NY**

22-25 August 1997
Silver Arrow Con 1
Robin Of Sherwood convention at Bristol Hilton. **Lynda Gilbert, 38 Sentinel Rd, West Hunsbury, Northants NN4 9UF**

23-24 August 1997
A Moment In Time
Beauty And The Beast convention at Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. **15 Carlton Terrace, Wanstead, London E11 2EX**

30 August 1997 *Recorder*
Who con celebrating the Second Doctor, on the Isle Of Man. **Mark Owen, Anorax Anonymous, 16 Governors Rd, Onchan, IOM IM3 1AU**

5-7 September 1997 *8th Inter. Festival Of Fantastic Films*
Brilliant SF/horror movies con at Sacha's Hotel, Manchester. **33 Barrington Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 1HZ**

12-14 September 1997
T'KON III
Star Trek con at The Queens Hotel, Leeds. **14 Middleton Grange, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2HP**

19-21 September 1997
Oxonmoot '97
24th annual Tolkien Society con at Exeter College, Oxford. **Flat 5, 357 High St, Cheltenham GL50 3HT**

27-28 September 1997
Hypotheticon '97
SF con at Central Hotel, Glasgow. **Flat 3/L, 38 Scotchton St, Glasgow G14 0UN**

3-5 October 1997 *Midcon 16*
Star Trek/media con at Holiday Inn, Leicester. **54 Campion Way, Sheringham, Norfolk NR26 8UN**

24-27 October 1997
Cult TV: Action '97
Annual TV con, Caister. **PO Box 1701, Peterborough PE7 1ER**

30 October-2 November 1997
1997 World Fantasy Convention
Dracula celebration at International Hotel, Docklands. **PO Box 31, Whitby, N Yorks YO22 4YL**

14-16 November 1997
Novacon 27
Annual SF con at De Vere Hotel, Great Malvern. **14 Park St, Lye, Stourbridge, W Mids DY9 8SS**

22-23 November 1997
Cloister Bell
Cult TV con at Pontin's, Brean Sands. **CJ Francis, 34 Etsome Terrace, Somerton, Somerset TA11 6LS**

30 November 1997 *Starcon '97*
Star Wars con organised by the *Star Wars* Appreciation Society at Towngate Theatre, Basildon. **Nelson House, 341 Lea Bridge Rd, London E10 7LA**

2-4 January 1998
Shin Nen Kai '98
Anime con at Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. **PO Box 3038, Wokingham RG40 3YF** or **shinnenkai@hpsound.demon.co.uk**

13-15 February 1998
Lightspeed '98
Now cancelled!

10-13 April 1998 *Intuition*
48th National SF Convention (Eastercon) at Piccadilly Hotel, Manchester. New Address: **1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey SM5 3LQ**

22-25 May 1998 *Lazlar Lyricon II*
20th anniversary *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* convention at Scotch Corner Hotel, Darlington. **67 South Pk Gdns, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 1HZ**

10-12 July 1998 *Infinity*
SF con at Angel Hotel, Cardiff. **Swn-y-Nant, Stuart St, Treherbert, Rhondda CF42 5PR**

18-20 September 1998
Oxonmoot '98
25th annual Tolkien Society Convention at Oxford. **Flat 5, 357 High St, Cheltenham GL50 3HT** or **tolksoc@tolkiensociety.org**

18-21 September 1998
Discworld Convention
More Pratchett fun at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. **PO Box 3086, Colchester, Essex CO2 8TY** or **queries@dwcon.ispace.org**

19-21 February 1999
Lightspeed '99
Multimedia SF con at Hilton Hotel, Coventry. **16 Bramwell St, Eastwood, Rotherham, South Yorks S65 1RZ**

2-5 April 1999 *Reconvene*
49th National SF Convention (Eastercon) at Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Please write to: **3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol BS6 6SZ**

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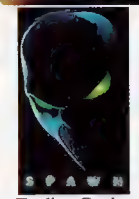

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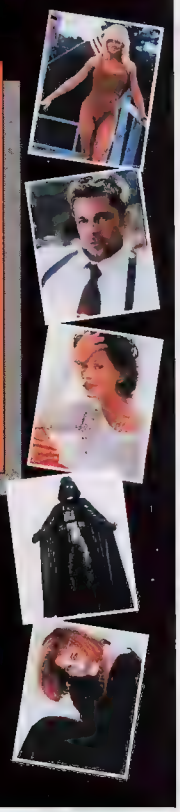

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SPAWN & GEN 13

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Printed in full colour on newsprint stock in exactly the same size and style as the US editions, these South African variant printings of Spawn and Gen 13 were relatively successful in their own markets and started to introduce whole new generations of people to the hobby that we know and love.

We have now obtained Special Reader Packs of these books, just for you. When these books first came our way, it was recommended that we charge up to double guide per issue for rarity. "Hey guys", we said "that is not our style and never will be". "We offer our customers the right to be able to afford and enjoy the comics, and we take our mandate seriously". "Inexpensive reading & collectibility is what The Comics Warehouse is all about, now, ...let's re-negotiate that price again..."

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PENPALS

● **Age 42,** my interests cover all SF&F. I produce and present radio programmes. Wish to correspond to overseas people, male/female, all ages. I will reply. John Weeks, 19 Bennett Ave, Belgrave, 3160, Australia

● **Crazy 14 year old girl,** loves sci-fi, fantasy, etc. Wants male penpals, any age. anoraks need not apply! Cara McPhail, 18 Abbotsford Rd, Bearsden, Glasgow G61 4HT

● ***X-Files* fan** from Hong Kong would like to meet *X-Files* fans out there. Please write to: Vivien MW Lin, Flat B, 11/F, Block 3, Pokfulam Gdn, 180 Pokfulam Rd, Hong Kong

● **Nutter from Neptune:** seeks beings released from loony bins. Talk about UFOs, etc, *X-Files, Red Dwarf,* indie, cover-ups & life! Age: 14-18. Contact Kelly W, 27 Farnborough Ave, Selsdon, Surrey CR2 8HF. No geeks!

● **17 year old *Star Trek* fan** from Finland seeks new pen pals of all ages. Also interested in *X-Files* and other sci-fi and horror. Anna Mäkinen, Suolahdentie 208C, 42700 Keuruu, Finland

● **Hi, I'm looking for female pen pal** interested in *X-Men, X-Files, Star Wars, Smashing Pumpkins, Ash, Oasis.* I'm aged 16 and would like to hear from any girls of the same age with the same likes. Daniel Shiels, Carn Clones, Co. Monaghan, Ireland

● **26 light years** under my belt, desire close encounter with lovely ladies 16+. I enjoy *R&H, DS9, ST:TNG,* B&Q, YSBOB. I also like animals and macrame. Oran Trump, 28 Springfield Rd, St James, Exeter, Devon EX4 6JL

● **Yo! Space cadet (age 14)** seeks the answers to life, love and my existence. Any supercool dudes, hepcats and fanboys – send me your problems – I see all in my crystal ball. Charlotte Tedbury, Flat 1, The Winter Gardens, Sidmouth, Devon

● **16 year old male sci-fi fan** seeks female fans around the same age. Interests include: *Trek* and Manga. Photo if possible. R Bampfylde, 64 Wellington St, Torpoint, Cornwall PL11 2DG

● ***Aliens, Star Wars, Space: Above And Beyond* –** cool or what! Males or females 18+ write to Jason, 64 Bro-teify, Cardigan, Dyfed SA43 1OQ

● **Attention** all *TNG, DS9, B5* and other sci-fi fans. I'm a 15 year old alien female who wants to make contact with male or female 15-17. Please write to Rebecca Noakes, 57 Halstow Way, Pitsea, Basildon, Essex SS13 2NY

● **Female, 14,** mad *X-Files* fan would like to hear from M/F interested in *X-Files, Red Dwarf,* age 14-18. Also likes *Friends.* Cally Littler, Bell Hse, Flaxmere, Norley, Cheshire WA6 6PF

● **Male, 15** seeks female penpals anywhere in the world. Into *X-Files* and *Red Dwarf,* UFOs etc. Would like photo also. Michael Heard, Lenthall Hse, Church Lane, Burford, Oxon OX18 4SA

● **15 year old chap** wants to hear from a 15-16 year old lass who likes music, *X-Files, Terminator,* latest films and fashion. Conjon, Darfarham, Woodstock Rd, Stonesfield, Witney, Oxon.

● **To all *Discworld*** inhabiting vampire Time Lords from a galaxy far far away, my *X-Files* need you! Male, 26, wants penpals of any age, sex or from any earthly point of origin. Wacky SOH essential. ALA. Lord Ruthven, "Grimspound", 23 Oaks Close, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 7SH

● **Female Ratnick, aged 16,** seeking fellow Ratnicks to talk about *X-Files.* Would like to write to males or females, any age. Will reply to all letters. I also love reading and *American Gothic.* Katy Arnold, 10 Warwick Close, Carterton, Oxon OX18 3QD

● **Scully, 17,** seeks Mulder! Unoriginal, I know, but this sci-fi babe needs a fellow X-Phile into *Star Wars, Return to the Forbidden Planet* and *Friends.* Get scribbling to: Louise Brown, 41 Fountainhall Rd, Aberdeen AB15 4EW

● **I want to believe!** Female Eugene Tooms obsessive seeks penpal of any age/sex. Also loves *Red Dwarf* and any science fiction. If you wrote "the truth is out there" on a beach in Cyprus – please write! All letters answered. Regian Early, 19 Highfield Rd, Marske, Cleveland TS11 6EG

● **19 year old male** mud-wrestling *Val Kilmer* lookalike and compulsive liar seeks female penpals. Into *Babylon 5, Star Trek* and *Anne Rice Vampire Chronicles.* Stuart Millward, 59 Teme Rd, Halesowen, W Mids B63 2LU

● **15 year old male,** into *X-Files, Red Dwarf, Lois & Clark* and all other sci-fi in general, looking for male/female penpals, 14+. Paul Temple, 35 North View, Chilton Moor, Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne & Wear DH4 5NN

● **Male, 22,** calling fans of *The Simpsons, Trek, X-Files,* etc. got a good sense of humour? Do you want to write to me? If the answer is yes, write to Scott Burgess, 25 Phillips Ave, Largs, Ayrshire KA30 9EP

● **X-Phile wants to talk** to other X-Philes. Anyone out there? Write to Starbuck at: 45 Coleridge Ave, Yateley, Nr Camberley, Surrey GU17 7BJ

● **Obsessed *Lois & Clark* fan,** female, 15, would like towrite to others who are mad about the dynamic duo themselves. Also likes *X-Files.* Write to Amy Peters, 54 Birchwood Dr, Wilmington, Kent DA2 7NF

● **Sci-fi mad Time Lord** looking for penpals 20+, pref. Devon area but will write to anyone. All letters answered. Glen Canning, 20 Bradham Lane, Exmouth, Devon EX8 4BB

● **Female, 16, *X-Files* fan** seeks M/F penpals for long letters and chats about life. Write to me or stay unenlightened. Also into indie. All letters answered. Sophie Harrison, 163 Osborne Rd, Hornchurch, Essex RM11 1HG

● **Desperately seeking** any American/Japanese/European penpals, M/F, age 15+. 15 years old (male) and likes *X-Files, Outer Limits* and all sci-fi, etc. Gareth Trigg, 156 Fishtoft Rd, Boston, Lincs PE21 0BS

● **Helen, aged 10.** I want a girl penpal who likes *Babylon 5,* fantasy games, Princess Leia and also likes ponies. 53 Lindsay Ave, Poulton-le-Fylde, Blackpool, Lancs FY6 8BQ

● **29 year old into *Star Wars,*** *Star Trek, Dr Who.* Looking for male/female penpal. Also into *Red Dwarf,* galactic and SF books eg *Terry Pratchett.* Martin, 33 Darrington Dr, Warmsworth, Doncaster, S Yorks DN4 9LF

● **Mulder searching for Scully** aged 14-15. Response guaranteed. I like *The X-Files* and anything to do with the paranormal. Alex Vincent, 27 North Home Rd, Cirencester, Glos. GL7 1DL

● **Any *Red Dwarf,*** *ST, X-Files* and *Bill & Ted* freaks out there? If so, contact me. M/F, age 15+. Beckie Nicholson, 47 Westfield, Oval Yeadon, Leeds, W Yorks LS19 7NR

● **Calling all X-Philes,** DueSers and Nick Knight fans. I want to hear from fans of The *X-Files, Due South, Forever Knight, Superman,* etc. Oh yeah. I'm a mad, 16-year-old Scottish lass. Laura MacLean, 43 Willowbank, Wick, Caithness KW1 4NZ

● **Kiwi male (23)** into sci-fi, TV, cult and classic films, indi/britpop music, seeks female penpals from UK, Europe, USA, anywhere for rambling, ridiculous and meaningful exchanges. Michael Mather, 50 Athenree Rd, Athenree, RD1, Katikati, New Zealand

● **Male fan of '70s** *Tomorrow People, Dr Who* and horror films/novels, would like similar female friend. Gothic types especialy welcome. Darren, 29 Ludlow Grove, Blackpool, Lancs FY2 0PZ

● **Female X-Phile, aged 15,** seeks other obsessed fans, any age/sex. Other interests include vampires, *VR5* and *American Gothic.* Reply guaranteed. Caroline Jones, 2 Beech Grove, Loggerheads, Nr Market Drayton, Shropshire TF9 4BW

● **26 year old horror writer,** into *The X-Files, Star Trek,* etc, would like to hear from any male/female into the weird and wonderful. Sarah Evans, 12 Sturmer Court, Colchester, Essex CO2 8LU

● **Female, 16,** seeks like-minded beings. Must like *U2, X-Files* and *B5.* Any race, sex or lifeform. Long letters, opinions, views, welcome. I'll reply to all. C Bertrand, 29 Clifford Rd, Bentley Heath, Solihull, W Mids B93 8PF

● **Male, 24,** seeks female penpals into the finer things in life: superhero shows, *X-Files, Melrose,* etc. movies: sci-fi, fantasy, steamy. American comics. Like anything up there? Write to me. All letters answered: Lee Shard, 15 Randall St, Maidstone, Kent ME14 2TB

● **Vash seeks Picard.** Female, 22, huge *Trek* fan, wants letters etc from open-minded individuals into *Star Wars, DS9, Manga* and Vic Reeves. Patrick Stewart-alikes welcome!! Rachel, 153 Kedleston Rd, Derby DE22 3NT

● **If you're into aliens,** vampires, goth music, *Twin Peaks,* sci-fi (esp. PK Dick), tantrism, *Anne Rice, Tarantino, Clive Barker,* Fortean things, then please write. All letters answered. Joe Brincat, 6 Brigstoke Rd, Bristol BS2 8UB

● **22 year old female** seeks soulmate for anything in particular. Must like *The Crow.* No other requirements. All guaranteed reply if photo enclosed! Kay Garton, 8 Heath Lane, Skircoat, Halifax, W Yorks HX3 0BZ

● **Female *Babylon 5* fan, 25,** would like to write to fellow fans of this great TV programme. Also love *XF, TNG* and *Red Dwarf.* Write to: Tracey Daley, 12 The Crescent, Rhyl, Denbighshire LL18 4RA

● **Interested in talking *B5,*** *TNG, ST*? A little *Dwarf*? serious about the X's? Know your movies? Maybe a little horror? SF movies & TV. All letters answered, promise. Mat McCall, 15 Tobago Close, Basingstoke, Hants RG24 9PX

● **13 year old girl** looking for true *X-Files* fans ages 13-15, boy or girl. Please write to: Gayle Lyth, 58 Buckthorne Ave, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1TU. Reply guaranteed.

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David Langford

The Authorized Version

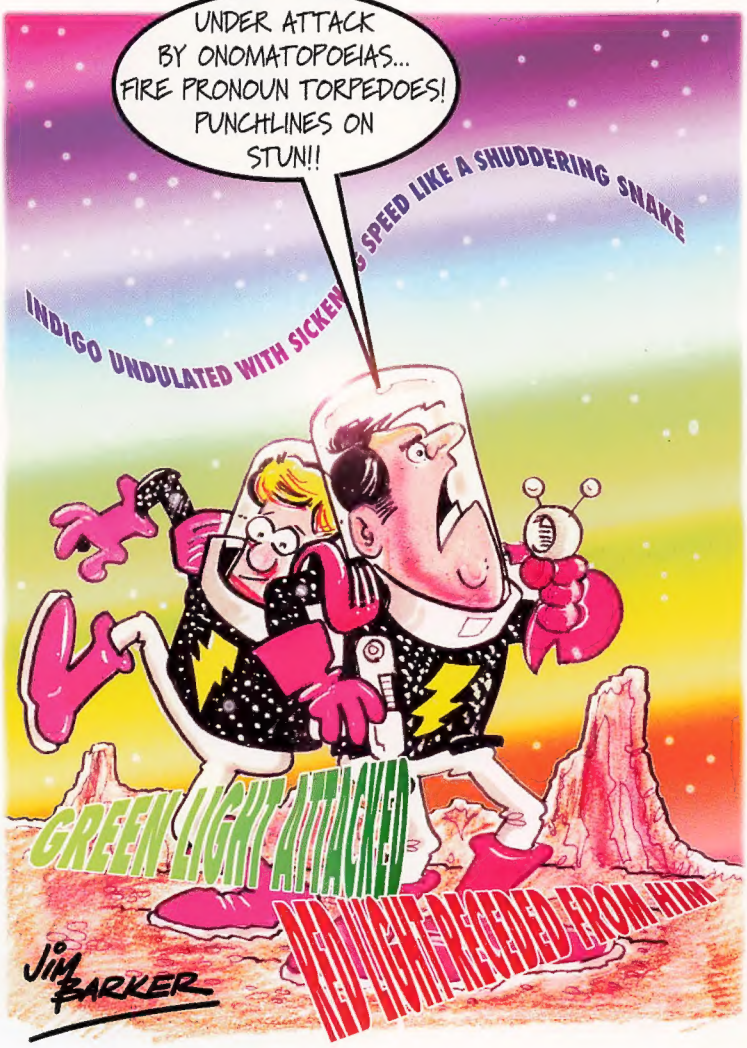
When you read a novel, the text isn't always quite what the author intended...

For example, wouldn't you think that Neil Gaiman of *Sandman* fame would assert total control over his first solo novel, *Neverwhere?* Well, um... First came the BBC edition, which owing to deadline hassles was pretty much first-draft. Readers' feedback caused Neil to make many changes – too late for BBC Publications. The later US edition has many improvements and plot repairs, but has been (ugh) Americanized. Some jokes were cut, and likewise difficult English words, like "linctus."

So the *Neverwhere* text with the author's blessing is the third, "international" version – based on that US revision, but with English words, jokes and allusions restored. "Could the UK Penguin edition please use this text?" asked Neil. "Sorry, guv, no can do," they said. "Penguin are using the BBC edition film. Can't change or add a word." Yes, the preferred text may never appear in English... But, lucky foreigners, it will be the basis for the French, Dutch, Israeli, etc. translations! Gaiman completists face tough times ahead.

Worse editorial horror stories abound. John Brunner howled with wrath in 1975 when his US editor merged two characters, Josh and Jake, in *The Shockwave Rider.* Eric Frank Russell's SF romp *Dreadful Sanctuary* (1951) was re-edited for a 1963 US paperback by some loon who axed the happy ending and added a gloomy one. AE van Vogt's first novel *Slan* was differently cut by British and US editors: each version has paragraphs missing from the other.

The best-known SF novel to suffer such treatment is the Alfred Bester epic which regularly features in All-Time Best lists. This one even has schizophrenic titles: *Tiger! Tiger!* here and *The Stars My Destination* in America.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INDIGO UNDULATED WITH SICKEN
SPEED LIKE A SHUDDERING SNAKE
GREEN LIGHT ATTACKED
JIM BARKER

© Jim Barker

In many ways the 1956 British text is better, with fewer cuts. The 1957 US edition is based on a *Galaxy* magazine serialization, shortened and rewritten by editor HL Gold. But the British editor also cocked up several things.

Stars/Tiger has a super-melodramatic revenge plot, borrowed by Bester from *The Count Of Monte Cristo* and set in the 25th century (our UK editor saw year numbers starting with 24 and called it the 24th century throughout). At the outset, space-hand Gully Foyle has been adrift for months in his wrecked craft Nomad – "He was one hundred and seventy days dying and not yet dead" – and sees salvation when the sister ship Vorga comes flying by. But his desperate distress flares are cruelly ignored, and Foyle swears revenge in gutter-speech: "Vorga, I kill you filthy."

There's a great transatlantic divide over this line. Our Brit editor thought it too strong: in all UK editions it's "Vorga, I kill you deadly." Likewise, Foyle's prayers – "Help, you goddamn gods" – are toned down: "Help, you Heels." Censorship horror!

The differences are most bizarre at the climax, where Foyle is trapped in a blazing cathedral, with his senses cross-wired by the shock of an explosion so that he perceives motion as noise, colour as pain, etc. To convey this delirium, Bester used wild typewriter doodles, plus graphics by artist Jack Gaughan. For example, the line, "The churning of the surf blinded him with batteries of footlights:" is illustrated by a glaring block of asterisks in Galaxy... Or, in other US editions, wavering and surf-like lines of asterisks... Or, in Britain, nothing at all. Lines like "A BEAM OF LIGHT ATTACKED," drawn by Gaughan in letters that grow larger from left to right, appear here in plain small capitals. Gaughan's effects all vanish in Britain. We get only what could easily be done by '50s typesetters – indeed, a bit less than that.

Good news, though. Two heroic Bester experts, Alex and Phyllis Eisenstein, have produced a restored edition of *The Stars My Destination* which combines the best of British and American versions. It's a Vintage (US) paperback, now available from import bookshops. There's also a new introduction by a chap who must now sympathize with Bester's nightmare of variant texts... Neil Gaiman!

David Langford hopes that Vintage will publish the 40,000 word authorized text of this column, with an intro by Pratchett.

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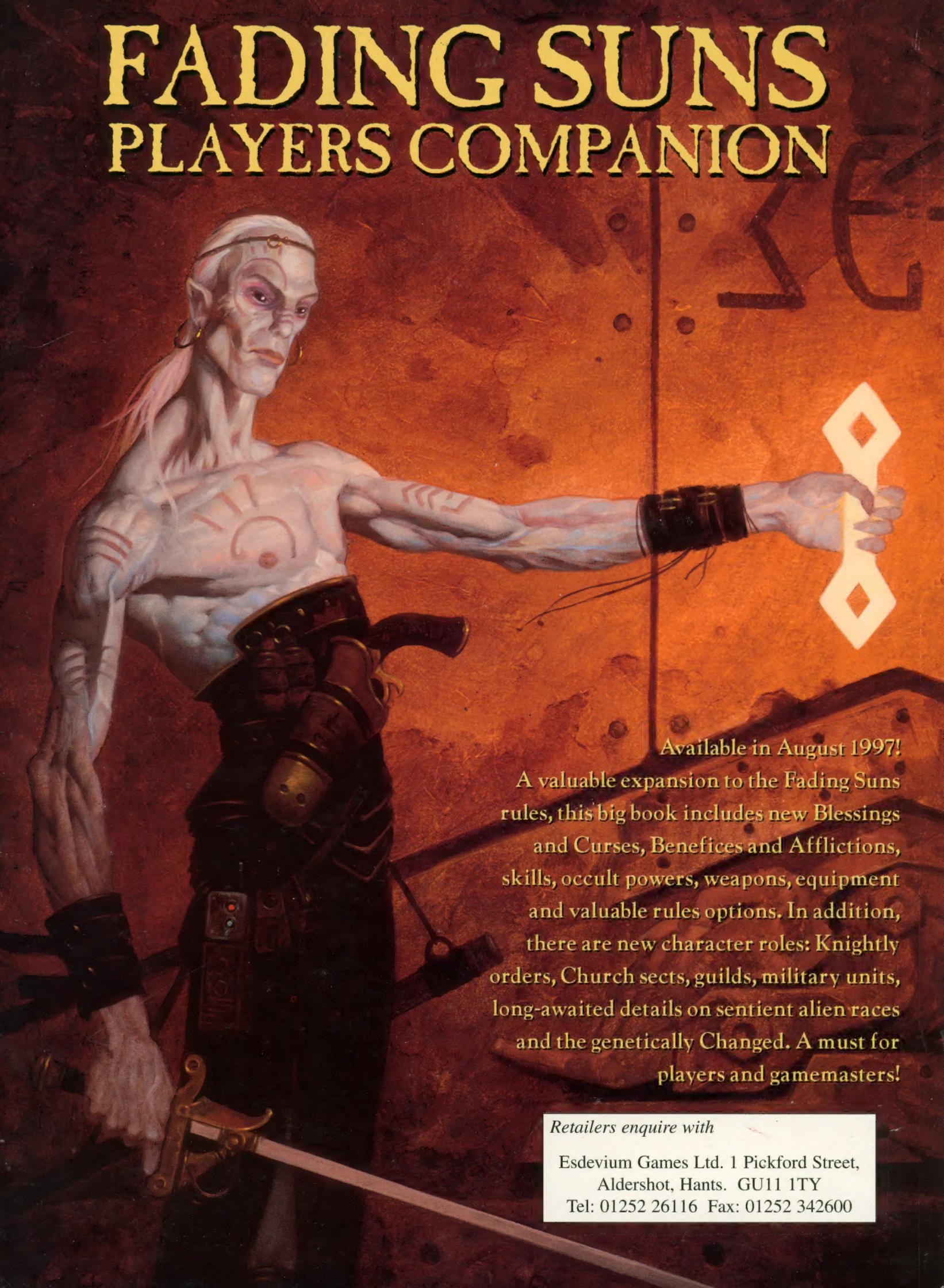

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